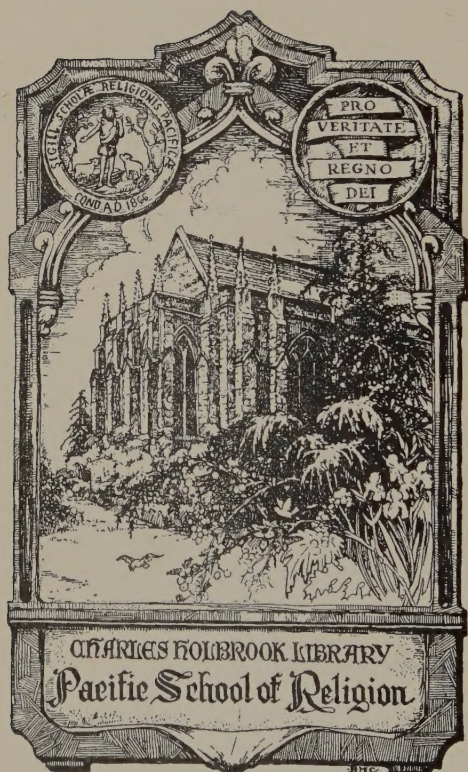


JOHN



JOHN



PLAYS BY PHILIP BARRY

THE YOUNGEST

YOU AND I

IN A GARDEN

WHITE WINGS

JOHN

PARIS BOUND

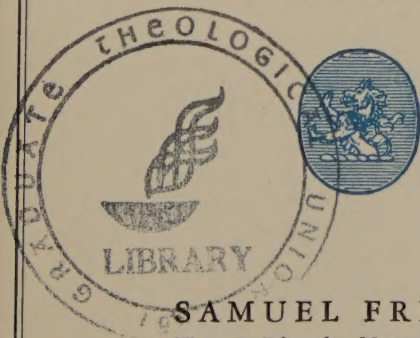
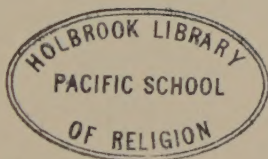
HOLIDAY

JOHN

A Play

BY

PHILIP BARRY



SAMUEL FRENCH

Thos. R. Edwards Managing Director
NEW YORK LOS ANGELES

SAMUEL FRENCH LTD. LONDON

1929

50726

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TO MY MOTHER AND MY SISTER

“JOHN” was first produced by The Actors Theatre at the Klaw Theatre in New York City on November 4, 1927. It was directed by Guthrie McClintic and the settings were designed by Norman-Bel Geddes.

CHARACTERS

JOHN
ANDREW
SIMON
JAMES
JOHN ZEBEDEE
NATHANIEL
ETHAN
DAN
HANAN
ANTIPAS
HERODIAS
SALOME
DANCING MASTER
FIRST GUARD
SECOND GUARD
FIRST MANSERVANT
SECOND MANSERVANT
PRISON OFFICIAL

ACTION AND SCENE

The action of the play takes place in Judæa, Galilee and Peræa within a period of four months in the year 30.

- ACT I: The Tent, near Jericho, in Judæa.
 II: The Tent, near Jericho, in Judæa.
 III: The Tent, near Aenon, in Galilee.
 IV: The Living-hall at Machærus, in Peræa.
 V: The Guard-hall at Machærus, in Peræa.

NOTE

“John” is a simple play, and it is the Author’s sincere wish that any production of it be made in the simplest manner possible, without posturing or declamation, elaborate settings or elaborate costumes. The living-hall of Act IV is a plain room and the guard-hall of Act V is plainer. The tent of the earlier Acts is much the same sort of tent that an itinerant preacher would use to-day. John’s men are dressed in smock-shirts, short breeches and canvas shoes. In Acts I and II Herodias and Antipas wear traveling-capes. In Act IV Antipas wears the equivalent of a dressing-gown. In Acts IV and V Herodias wears the equivalent of a house-dress and an evening-dress, respectively, and Salome’s costumes should be as simple. The guards are in campaigning uniforms. In short, settings and costumes should merely “be there” and be adequate. The less they are noticed, the better for the play.

P. B.

ACT ONE

ACT ONE

The interior of a spacious tent pitched on the east bank of the river Jordan. The main entrance is at Back, a little to the Right. There is another entrance down Left. Left Center, there is a table made of planks. It is flanked by benches. Additional furniture comprises a chest or two, earthen pots for water and oil, stools and cooking utensils.

The Time, is about 30 A. D. Sundown, on an evening in late Spring.

The Tent is empty for a moment, then HANAN cautiously puts his head in at the entrance down Left, and looks about him. He is a slender, intelligent-looking young Jew of about 26, well-dressed in jacket and short breeches with puttees wound round his legs. He turns and calls softly off Left:

HANAN

It's all right. There's no one here at all.

[He steps back from the entrance and a handsome woman of about 35 passes him and enters. She is followed by a man of smaller stature and unprepossessing appearance, somewhere in his early fifties. These are HERODIAS and HEROD ANTIPAS. HANAN enters after them and is followed by two men of military bearing, but not in uniform. These are the GUARDS. HERODIAS glances about her with genuine pleasure.]

HERODIAS

Yes—yes—just as I imagined.

ANTIPAS (*to the GUARDS*)

Hide yourselves in the sage outside there. I'll whistle if I want you.

HERODIAS

Hanan, he is all that you said of him. When I think of the violence this tent houses, I wonder it does not hang in ribbons.

ANTIPAS

Well, now you've seen the whole show.

HERODIAS (*to HANAN*)

Does he really fancy himself a prophet, do you suppose?

HANAN

Everyone says it.

HERODIAS

And in this day and age—think of it, Antipas!

ANTIPAS

Don't say my name! (*He looks about him, fearfully.*) It's not enough to drag the wagons miles off the route, is it? You've got to announce to a troop of crazy rebels who we are. Go on—tell 'em I've got nothing better to do than to steal about in clerk's clothes, spying on 'em—as if they gave me a moment's concern.

HERODIAS

Antipas, I—

ANTIPAS

Don't say it!

HERODIAS

—Console yourself, Excellency—no one will hear your sacred name, nor mine, neither. We are a successful merchant and his lady, of Jericho, on our way south.

ANTIPAS

—In the summer. That's good, that is.
[*She turns upon him with sudden venom.*]

HERODIAS

—And isn't it enough that *I* should have to spend it in a fortress at Machaerus, of all places, miles from anywhere? Machaerus! The very name gives me goose-flesh.

ANTIPAS

You'll put up with it, I expect—unless you want the country overrun with Arabs.

HERODIAS

—And am I to jog on for days across sand like this without some small diversion by the way?

ANTIPAS

Oh, it's only diversion, is it? I thought you'd made a real find. I thought you'd come on someone with the makings of another Zerrubabel, at least.

HERODIAS

Perhaps I have.

ANTIPAS

Perhaps it will snow in mid-summer.

HERODIAS

He is a prophet.

ANTIPAS

He is a noise, and a damned unmusical one.

HERODIAS

You and your delicate ears! (*A pause.*)—It may be to your interest to have faith in him—have you considered that?

ANTIPAS

No. Ought I? Why?

HERODIAS

In this land a crown does not sit well on a forehead
a prophet has not oiled.

[ANTIPAS *glances quickly at* HANAN.]

ANTIPAS

Crown? What are you talking about—

[HERODIAS *laughs shortly.*]

HERODIAS (*to* HANAN)

—But you think he may not be so well-disposed toward us. Why not?

HANAN

He has been heard to say—

[*He stops.*]

ANTIPAS

Well, say it.

HANAN

According to report, he said: "Their marriage is not lawful."

HERODIAS

No more?

ANTIPAS

—*Publicly*, you mean?

HANAN

Oh, no!

ANTIPAS

He would better not.

HERODIAS

Why? What are you afraid of?

ANTIPAS

He has a following. He is a menace.

HERODIAS

"Menace" is his Excellency's favorite word this year. The flies in Athens are a menace. A bad sauce is a menace. These new philosophies are menacing.
[*She moves toward the entrance at back.*]

ANTIPAS

This is no mere philosophy, Madam.

HERODIAS

Indeed it is not. It is a call to arms. And it is no mere following he has neither—it is a party.

ANTIPAS

Thank you for warning me.—My father had a good rule for dealing with such a man.

HERODIAS

—Kill him, eh?

ANTIPAS

Precisely.

HERODIAS

Well, I have a better rule.

ANTIPAS

What is it?

HERODIAS

—Use him. (*She stands in the entrance and looks off Left.*) What would you say his real aim is, Hanan?—Religious, or political?

HANAN

Both, I should say.

HERODIAS

I hope so. That is the most powerful union on this earth. (*She turns in the entrance and looks off Right.*) There is nothing cannot be attained to, with—

[*She stops abruptly.*]

ANTIPAS

Who is it?

HERODIAS

Some of his men. (*She re-enters the tent and moves toward the entrance at Left.*) Come quickly, will you?—You wait, Hanan. Learn all you can of them. See him himself, if possible. Then report to me at the wagons. If he is amiable, I shall come back to-night, otherwise I shall wait. (*To ANTIPAS.*) It's better to go *this* way, don't you think?

ANTIPAS

This is fine, this is—a man of my position, reduced to skulking in and out back doors.

[HERODIAS passes out ahead of him.]

HERODIAS

Take care where you put your foot here. These tent-ropes are a menace.

[ANTIPAS follows her. HANAN is alone for a moment, then ANDREW, SIMON and NATHANIEL come in from the other entrance. ANDREW is about 28, of the best type of Jewish peasant, small-boned, quiet, efficient. He and SIMON and NATHANIEL wear rough shirts and short breeches. Their legs are bare, their feet encased in canvas shoes. All are beardless. SIMON is 40, grey-haired, burly; NATHANIEL is 37, raw-boned and sandy. NATHANIEL stops short at the sight of HANAN.]

NATHANIEL

Oh, it's you again.

[HANAN smiles.]

HANAN

—I still, would be more exact.

NATHANIEL

Well, all I can say is I wouldn't want to put a horse through the sort of fog we get out here.—Not after dark, I wouldn't.

HANAN

I'll risk it.

NATHANIEL

The plain across the bridge is full of rabbit-holes.—Snap a leg like a tooth-pick. I'm only warning you.

HANAN

It's a hunter I'm riding. He's knows how to keep clear of them.

SIMON

What d'you want of him, eh? Baptism? Wash your little soul clean for you, under your pretty clothes, eh?

[HANAN *smiles again*.

HANAN

I presume that what I want of him is my own business.

[ANDREW *turns*.

ANDREW

—That's what you presume, is it?

HANAN

Yes.

ANDREW

And you won't tell it?

HANAN

No.

ANDREW

All right, boys—

[SIMON and NATHANIEL advance upon HANAN. HANAN holds up his hand.]

HANAN

Just a moment.

ANDREW

Well?

HANAN

Are you sure I can trust you?

SIMON

“Can he trust us?!” (*He laughs, and scowls at him.*)

No. Any good Pharisee mother in Jericho’ll tell you, we eat children. First we roll ’em in oil, then fry ’em, and eat ’em between cabbage-leaves. I haven’t had a drum-stick in days. I’m hungry.

ANDREW

That’s enough of that, Simon. (*To HANAN.*) What is it you want?

HANAN

A few words with him, merely.

SIMON

About what?

ANDREW

He’s in no state to talk, now. They’ve come out in droves, this week. He needs all the rest he can get.

NATHANIEL

Go on back to town. You'll get all the talk you want in town. We work here.

HANAN

There are thousands of us in the cities as active in this movement as you, my friend, and don't you forget it.

SIMON

He calls it "a movement."

NATHANIEL

What's your party?

HANAN

That is unimportant. I think you'll grant that *all* parties expect relief—salvation—Messiah—whatever you want to call it. At present, it looks as if your master's preaching of its imminence, may succeed in uniting the public as nothing has in years.—I said *may* succeed.

NATHANIEL

We heard you. And now if you'll just—

HANAN

Please let me finish: The fact is, that priests can howl, Pharisees pray, Zealots march on Rome with fifty men, but till we all howl and pray and march *as one man*, we shall continue to be ruled by Rome and continue to pay through the nose for the privilege.

NATHANIEL

Listen to him, will you—

HANAN

Sir, I—

SIMON

Rest a bit, little man. You're all a-tremble.

[HANAN *turns away in disgust.*]

HANAN

Agh!

SIMON

Run along home, now, like a good boy and sit in your big house at cakes and wine with your fine foreign friends.

ANDREW

Quit it, Simon.

SIMON

He's a Sadducee, isn't he? Oh *I* know 'em!

NATHANIEL

So do I—by the cut of their breeches. Damned traitors, that's what.

HANAN

You are an ignorant lot.

SIMON

Tell me, cherub: did I hear you right, or didn't I?

HANAN

I think you did. "An ignorant lot," I said. (*He rises.*) Because a man wears decent clothes, he's a traitor, eh?—I think we've talked enough.

NATHANIEL

Too much, I'd say.

HANAN (*to* ANDREW)

I shall wait for him outside.

ANDREW

Hold on a minute. (*To* SIMON *and* NATHANIEL.) Maybe he's right. What do we know of the gentry? (*To* HANAN.) If we have misjudged you, I regret it. John will know. We have reason to suspect folk like you. But John will know.

HANAN

I told you that I was not a deputy, and I am not. In fact, I am able to assure you that there's to be no official action against him. At least not now.

NATHANIEL

How do you know that?

HANAN (*carefully*)

There is a person of considerable importance in official circles—a real patriot. This person has, I think, a just estimate of the value of John's work. She is in a position to—

ANDREW

“She”—!?

SIMON

Oh, la! A woman!

HANAN

I repeat: for the present you are quite safe. No one will molest you.

[There is a silence. Then:]

SIMON

Boys, it's a fact: at last we've got what we've always wanted—a real protectress.—How do I look—is my face clean?

HANAN

Is this ignoramus drunk, or is he merely simple-minded?

SIMON (*amiably*)

Mind who you call ignoramus, Cherub. My palm's itching for your butt, already.

ANDREW

And what name does she go by?

NATHANIEL

—Yes—what does she call herself, this great lady that loves us so?

HANAN

I cannot give names at present.

NATHANIEL

I thought not.

HANAN

However, I *can* tell you that the intelligent element in town is more than a little interested in this man John,

SIMON

Imagine that, now.

HANAN

Of course, they're quite aware of how Cyrus failed at the same game—Zerrubabel—Simon Maccabeus—a dozen others. But—

NATHANIEL

Our John's a stronger dose than the whole lot of 'em put together!

SIMON

He's a real prophet, John is!

HANAN

I should like to believe that. We haven't had one to amount to anything in three hundred years. We need something like a prophet.

SIMON

Well, there never was one like John. No—and never will be, neither!

NATHANIEL

Except him who's to come after—he's the only one.

SIMON

Go on! John comes after himself!

HANAN

You think he is to be the Messiah, then.—That's interesting—that's the sort of thing I want to find out. (*To ANDREW.*) All we know is that here's an amazingly popular preacher who is rapidly develop-

ing into a national hero. Well—what about him? Where was he born? How old is he? Who were his parents? Was there anything unusual about his early life? We want the facts.

ANDREW

The first time I ever saw him was at a street-fair in Ain-Karim. He couldn't have been more than ten or twelve, then.

HANAN

—And was there any evidence of—er—this sort of future?

ANDREW

He'd got a prayer-box for his birthday. In it was a scroll of the history of Creation to the Flood. He wanted to trade it for one I had, of the first eight chapters of Leviticus, and a slingshot.

[SIMON *laughs*. DAN *comes in, Back. He is carrying a pan under his arm and wiping another dry, with a cloth. He is big and amiable, with a broad unintelligent face.*

HANAN

—Street-fairs and trading prayer-boxes—not very astonishing, is it? I had hoped for something a little better.

ANDREW

His father and mother—

SIMON

Wait! Let me tell him. (*He advances toward HANAN and stands facing him with closed eyes, talking very*

*fast:—*Elizabeth was sixty-five. Her whole life she'd been barren as a bone. Zachary himself was eighty, a priest of the Eighth Course. One day as he was about his duties in the Temple—if this don't astonish you, I don't know what will—one day a whole host of angels came and perched upon the pinnacles of the high altar. And the chief among 'em flew down and sat in the old man's beard and said, "Praise God: your wife Elizabeth is with child." "Shoo!" said Zachary, "Get out!" At this, the angel flew into a rage, and dragged seven hairs from out of the old boy's beard—

NATHANIEL

—Four of 'em are in a vase on the small altar, wriggling like adders—

SIMON

Two became gnats, a he and she, and that's how gnats originated.

NATHANIEL

The seventh floats on high above the Temple Gates. A dozen picked Canaanites were once employed to get it down. Five wrenched their wrists. The sixth, his stomach burst. Three were—

SIMON

They're no matter.—Zachary was struck dumb. Elizabeth conceived. When the child, John, was born, a band of gypsies saw hills behind the town prancing like goats. Elijah's own juniper-tree marched in from Jordan and bowed three times above the cradle, which rocked itself. Remark that, will you! Was

ever anything more remarkable? A barren mother, seventy years old? A father, ninety-three?—Are you astonished?

HANAN

Very pretty. Very pretty, indeed. You know your Scripture don't you?—Samuel and Samson.

SIMON

If they was begat wonderfully, then John was too!

NATHANIEL

It's a sound tale, anyway. It'll bear serving over.

SIMON

Give 'em wonders! That's what they want! Listen: when he was a babe of three, one day his mother was—

ANDREW

Quit it—d'you hear me? What do you want to make of John—some angel's prank? What is this camp anyhow—a circus? John's John—and that's enough? (*To HANAN.*) His father and mother were wed years without chick nor child, that's true. But he was begot and born like the rest of us.—And he's as different from us—as different as day is from night. What more wonder do you want than that? Here's us—there's John. Are floods and earthquakes any more wonderful?

SIMON

All I can say is, he's a bigger man than Samuel and Samson. And if they was born queer, John was born queerer.

DAN

But maybe they wasn't, neither.

SIMON

Scripture says it!

ANDREW

John is a man as the Lord made man to be. And if you were different or I was different or any of us—so might we be. The hope in that's a sight more marvellous to me than any sleight-o'-hand, even if the sleight's a miracle, and the hand the Lord A'mighty's!
[*A silence. SIMON and NATHANIEL look at one another. Finally:*

NATHANIEL

Andrew, Andrew—

SIMON

Brother, you blaspheme.

ANDREW

It's you who have done that.

[*HANAN clears his throat portentously.*

HANAN

Perhaps, *you* think he's the Messiah, too.

ANDREW

Never mind what I think.

HANAN

—Or Elijah come back for a spell, maybe. His appearance—the general manner and attack—

[*JOHN'S voice is heard from outside the entrance at Back.*

JOHN (*calling*)

James! Where are you, James?

[JAMES'S voice is heard in reply.

JAMES

Right here, Sir.

JOHN

Come inside, will you?

[JOHN strides in, followed by JAMES, a rather diffident, spare man of thirty-five or six. JOHN is a striking figure—strong, rangy, beardless—in age, about thirty-two. He is dressed as his followers, except that his shirt is of loose-woven camel's hair, bound at the waist with a knotted leather girdle. He carries a heavy stick which he flings into a corner. Without seeing HANAN, he places his foot upon a chest and bends over it to remove a stone from his shoe.

JOHN

—Where have you put those new boys, James?

[HANAN is watching him, intently.

JAMES

They found a dry spot up the bank, under some laurels.

ANDREW

One went home to tell his wife.

NATHANIEL

That leaves seven.

JOHN

Seven's too many—we'll have more baptizers than baptized. Who are they? Where do they hail from?

ANDREW

I've got the roll here somewhere. (*He fumbles at his belt, draws out a scrap of parchment and reads from it:*) "Jem, son of Seth, of Jericho, carpenter; Baruch, son of Enoch, of Salim, carpenter; Samuel, son of Joel, of Aenon, barber; Jesus, son of Joseph, of Nazareth, carpenter; Mortimer, son of Saul, of Antioch, no occupation given; John, son of Zebedee, of Bethsaida, fisherman.

JOHN (*to JAMES*)

Your brother?

JAMES

That's right!

JOHN

If he stays we must call him— (*He turns and sees HANAN.*)—Who is this? What is it *you* want?

HANAN

I rode out from town this afternoon, Sir. I wanted to—

JOHN

—To see a miracle or two, maybe. I regret we cannot oblige you—so you may ride back again.

[*HANAN laughs shortly.*]

HANAN

I don't care so much about miracles. I—

JOHN

No? What's wrong with 'em? Too common?

HANAN

I came to bring you news of the cities, and of the progress of your work there.

JOHN

I don't go to the cities.

HANAN

Your words do. It is possible that in my poor way I might tell you how they are received there.

[JOHN looks at him for a moment, then turns to ANDREW.

JOHN

Leave me with him.

ANDREW

But you're dropping in your tracks already, Sir.

JOHN

I, dropping? Me? from dipping a few souls into Jordan?

[*He continues to watch* HANAN.

ANDREW

—A thousand, this week.

JOHN

Oh come now, Andrew, you exaggerate.

ANDREW

More than a thousand.

JOHN

Then save your coddling of me for a week when a hundred come. That's when I'll need it. (JAMES, DAN

and SIMON move toward the entrance, Back.)—James, if your brother stays among us we must call him Zebedee. We can't have two Johns in camp, can we?

JAMES

He won't mind anything so long as he's let stay, Sir.

JOHN

One of 'em had the holiest face ever I saw. I was struck by it. "It's you who ought to be baptizing me," said I. (*They laugh.*) I meant it!—Well—sift 'em down—four's plenty. We'll give 'em a few days instruction before we break camp.

[JAMES, SIMON *and* DAN *go out.*

ANDREW (*following them*)

Right, Sir—weed 'em out.

JOHN

Next week, we move north for a month. While we're gone they'll do their first fast solitary, mountains or desert, as they choose. When we get back, they come in—they that survive it.

ANDREW

Understood, Sir. I'll tell 'em— (*HANAN seats himself upon a bench. ANDREW turns sharply.*) Stand up!

[*HANAN rises. ANDREW goes out.*

JOHN

They stand before me. You see, I come from God.

HANAN

I see.

JOHN

Well, what is it?

HANAN

You—you're much younger than I expected.

JOHN

You're not here to paint my picture, are you?

[HANAN *laughs nervously*.

HANAN

Hardly.

JOHN

Come on! Come on!

HANAN

There's a—there's a group of rather influential people in Jericho whom I've—er—more or less succeeded in interesting in your work. They aren't your usual audience—they present a somewhat different problem.

JOHN

Different. Well, well. Who are they? Sadducees?

HANAN

For the most part, yes.

JOHN

Indeed.

HANAN

—I'm sure you don't make the mistake some of your men do, of thinking that just because a person is wealthy and well-born—

JOHN

I make no mistakes at all.

HANAN

The fact is, Sir, that you've assured yourself of the eventual support of every party but the Sadducees—and by Jove, we need them badly! We can't get on without them!

JOHN

“We”?

HANAN

You and I.

JOHN

Ah, yes.

HANAN

To outfit troops, money is essential. Private money.

JOHN

We are to outfit troops, then.

HANAN

I am not informer, Sir. You need not concern yourself for my patriotism—nor for theirs.

JOHN

But how is it with their faith? Do they believe Messiah comes—comes any day now?

HANAN

They think it is an idea full of—

JOHN

Idea!—He is promised! Isn't it written that if Israel repents for one day only, he will come?

HANAN

Three hundred years is a long time to wait. You must realize, as I do, that when any nation is oppressed as we are, the common hope for relief always takes that form—redemption by act of God, and all that.

JOHN

You are a wise lad, aren't you? So wise I marvel at you!

HANAN

Don't misunderstand me. The Messianic idea may express itself to you in terms of an individual—world conqueror—to me, as an Age, an era. What does it matter? It's the idea that's important.

JOHN

It is the Almighty's word, His truth, His promise!

HANAN

But who shall name the manner of its fulfillment?

JOHN

I shall! (*A pause.*) I mean— (*Then, with a gesture.*) —I need not explain. (*A silence. Then suddenly he roars:*) Oh, I'm no Chasidist, looking for him to come down before my eyes upon a moonbeam—no!

HANAN

How *do* you look for him?

JOHN

—Somewhere to-day in Israel a man got up and did his work and lay him down again, like any other man. But the day is one day nearer when he will be possessed by God as other men by devils, and will not lay him down any more.

HANAN

I see. That's quite a reasonable conception, quite. (*He thinks a moment.*) Sir, let me inform you that for months your mission has been followed with warm interest by one of the cleverest intellects in Israel. —I don't speak of myself.

JOHN

—Another? Heaven is good to me.

HANAN

I might as well tell you frankly: it is a woman.

JOHN

No!

HANAN

—A woman. It is at her suggestion that I have arranged a kind of garden-party on my father's place, near Jericho. Important people will be there—important Sadducees. I want you to come in for it. Of course, all incidental expenses will be paid. A chance, what?

JOHN

I am to be taken up by the lordly rich, eh?—to sit in their high chairs with 'em.

HANAN

I think you'll be a sensation. Your looks, your voice, your accent—the curious, old-fashioned way you phrase things—you're straight out of Israel's greatest Age—and Jove, how we do need you! (*He goes to JOHN and drops his hand upon his shoulder.*) John, you're our man.

[JOHN bounds up and flings the hand aside.

JOHN

Lay off, you little lizard, you!

[HANAN laughs, uneasily.

HANAN

Well really! I—

JOHN

You are of a priestly house, are you? What house?

HANAN

I am of the house of Hanan. I mean to say, I—

JOHN

God blast your house.

HANAN

Sir, you forget yourself.

JOHN

“Hanan”—and how much are pigeons to-day, little one? A gold-piece? I need a pair for sacrifice.

HANAN (*with dignity*)

My family no longer holds that monopoly.

JOHN

Ten years was enough to line all your pockets, wasn't it?

HANAN

You may spare your insults, Sir. Will you come to us as I have asked, or will you not?

JOHN

Get out. I grow less fond of you each minute.

HANAN

That's neither here nor there. The fact remains I am of the utmost importance to your cause. My influence extends into every sect and party. Listen: I shall tell you something I had not intended to. (*His voice lowers.*) I know Herodias.

[JOHN stares for a moment incredulous.]

JOHN

What? And you—

HANAN

Believe it or not, I know her as a friend.—In fact, she and Antipas are to spend the night in my father's house on their way south to Machaerus. I think that is evidence enough of friendship.

JOHN

It is plenty.

HANAN

—There is something not commonly appreciated: Herodias is most conscious of her Maccabaeon blood.

Herodias, sir, is a patriot.—Does that affect your decision?

JOHN

Go tell that harlot and her master I say their sin is an abomination! Their marriage is incestuous!

HANAN

You—! (*A pause.*) I advise you to be careful, calling royalty incestuous.

JOHN

Incest and adultery—right royal pastimes, aren't they? Tell them if they do not repent their sin, forsake each other and do penance, God will utterly pluck up and destroy them. Say he has told me so.

HANAN

Surely, you don't pretend—

JOHN

Get out, you lousy pigeon-peddler. You have dropped dung on my clean floor, and who shall scour it?

HANAN

—I swear, you're like some figure out of Scripture.
—Part clown, part Jeremiah.

[ANDREW and NATHANIEL come in followed by SIMON:

JOHN

—Clown, is it? Well, run to those fat kine there in your father's garden—shout to 'em that I have struck a most antic attitude and bid 'em repent! For one comes who has a most nimble hand, d'you hear me?—He comes soon—and those whose necks

are hard against him, he will strip 'em bare, clothe 'em again in old cast clouts and rotten rags and set 'em up for gazing-stocks. There is my sermon—you preach it for me. Now get out!

HANAN (*to* ANDREW)

He is superb. I am delighted with him. (*To* JOHN.) I hope you'll like me better on second meeting. People do, as a rule.

[*He goes out. It is now almost dark. DAN, JAMES and ETHAN come in. ETHAN is the youngest of the 'disciples.*

JOHN

How can the Lord know these things and still withhold Messiah—how can He? Oh, I am tired of waiting for him.

[*A silence. ANDREW looks about him to the others. Then:*

ANDREW

Sir, I'd like to say something for all of us, and it's this: even if Messiah should not come in our time, you have made a—

JOHN

“Not in our time?!”—and what do you mean by that? Have I doubters here in my own camp—have I? Well, who doubts get out—and be quick about it! [*No one moves.*

ANDREW

I meant—

JOHN

Confound your meanings! He comes! *Now!* I know it. My bones ache of it. What do you want to do—put sticks and stones across the highway I'm laying down for him?—Shall he come stumbling? Eh? Shall he? Get one thing in your heads: there are demands even God must answer to man's want, man's will. These are His own weapons, which He has set in our hands, and in His armor there are chinks which they find out. Well, I want Messiah, hear me? I want him *now!* And God must give him up, or I shall take arms and storm the gates and start him from out His bosom! I know my business. See that you know yours. (*He seats himself upon a cot, Left, and thrusts his feet out.*) Take off my shoes. (*DAN quickly goes to him, bends and removes his shoes. JOHN begins a litany:*) Lord God of Hosts, your people perish.

[*The Disciples respond in chorus:*

DISCIPLES

Send the Deliverer.

JOHN

The shadow of the eagle lies on the Temple steps.

DISCIPLES

Send the Deliverer.

JOHN

Your banner is befouled.

DISCIPLES

Send the Deliverer.

[*They begin to remove their own shoes and loosen*

their shirts. DAN and ETHAN bind down flaps across the entrance.

JOHN

Your garments torn.

DISCIPLES

Send the Deliverer.

JOHN

Profanity is in your house.

DISCIPLES

Send the Deliverer.

JOHN

Blasphemy upon your forehead.

DISCIPLES

Send the Deliverer.

JOHN

Rust upon your promise.

DISCIPLES

Send the Deliverer.

[JOHN *lets himself down upon his cot.*

JOHN (*lower*)

From sin and poverty of spirit.

DISCIPLES

Lord God of Hosts deliver us.

[*There is a silence. ANDREW looks to SIMON. SIMON takes up JOHN's refrain:*

SIMON

From miseries and wretchedness, from plague and pestilence.

[JOHN *responds with the Disciples.*

DISCIPLES AND JOHN

Lord God of Hosts deliver us.

SIMON

From the dark night and the deep pit.

DISCIPLES

Lord of Hosts deliver us.

[JOHN *is silent.*

SIMON

From under skirts of harlots.

DISCIPLES

Lord of Hosts deliver us.

SIMON

From gluttony.

DISCIPLES

Lord of Hosts deliver us.

[DAN *yawns.* ETHAN *swallows a cup of water.* JOHN *is asleep.* SIMON *glances at him, then at ANDREW, who nods and smiles.*

SIMON

From greed.

DISCIPLES

Lord of Hosts deliver us.

ANDREW

From doubt! From doubt! From doubt!

DISCIPLES

Lord God of Hosts deliver us!

[NATHANIEL, JAMES and ETHAN lie down and cover themselves with blankets. SIMON pulls his shirt off over his head. JOHN'S deep, steady breathing is plainly audible.

[The curtain begins to descend.

SIMON

That we may honor You.

DISCIPLES (*mumbling*)

Send the Deliverer.

SIMON

That we may praise Your face.

DISCIPLES

Send the Deliverer.

SIMON

That we may—

Curtain.

ACT TWO

ACT TWO

The Tent, a month later. The Jordan, near Jericho. Bright noonday sun outside. A bright shaft of sunlight through the entrance down Left.

ETHAN is piling up kindling-wood near the back entrance. The Tent has a somewhat less "lived-in" look than in the preceding scene. Two bowls of food and a spoon are on the table.

After a moment JAMES enters down Left.

ETHAN

Sermon over yet?

JAMES

Not yet, no.

ETHAN

Long one, ain't it?

JAMES

They need a long one. What are those wagons, do you know?

ETHAN

All I could get out of the guides was "Jericho family on pleasure trip."

JAMES

Fancy trappings for Jericho.—I see a deputy under every robe, these days, and soldiers behind every bush.

ETHAN

It's just that we're getting the quality now, James, getting 'em good and proper.

JAMES

Sadducees in full feather—well, there'll be some wilted plumage when he's through with them.

ETHAN

Most preachers'd count folk like that a step up.

JAMES

Not he. He hates 'em.

ETHAN

Come high, come low, say I. I'm for variety. I'll duck a duke same as I will a drayman. They all look alike, once their head's wet.

JAMES

Don't make light of baptism, Ethan.

ETHAN

I'm not. But did you ever see anything funnier'n those first two this morning? Did you ever hear such confessions? (JAMES *slits open a bag of meal in silence.*) And did you note Nathaniel's face? Did you?

JAMES

Simon laughed out loud.

ETHAN

—Each of 'em was so hot to outdo the other one in his sins. I thought for awhile there it would end in a fight as to which was blackest.

JAMES

Confession to some of them is the same as getting drunk.

ETHAN

To me it was more of a good dose of aloes.

JAMES

It's agreeable to be back here again. I like this spot.

ETHAN

I wonder did the new boys see our fire last night. They'd ought to be in soon, if they did.

JAMES

He said to lay another one that'll burn till morning.

ETHAN

This is a good time to tell me that. Do you know how long I've been working on this pile?

JAMES

I'll help you take it out again.

ETHAN

Someone'll have to.

JAMES

They won't miss the fire the second night.

ETHAN

I wonder how many of 'em'll come back? Last time five went out, and only two, me and Dan—

JAMES

I know. Empty bellies and the lonely going change hearts as nothing else does.

ETHAN

Just the same, I wish I was one of 'em, away out there wherever they are. Remember it, James?

JAMES

I did my first fast by a blasted oak tree, over a little spring. Of course I wandered a little in my mind, but I recall it, yes—I recollect it pleasant, most of it.

ETHAN

I took to the hills and climbed as high's ever I could. I was sure on my feet as any goat you ever heard of. I acted like a fool. Once you know what I did?—I threw myself flat on the ground and took the whole world in my arms, like you would a woman. It's a fact.

JAMES

Hush, Ethan, hush!

ETHAN

What's wrong with that? I knew the world was sick, and I was after comforting it, that's all. Then everything got so quiet and peaceful—I used to be in the markets, you know, and it was new to me. It seemed like I didn't weigh no more'n a feather, and everything was so clear and steady. I looked at my hands like I'd never saw 'em before. I even breathed dif-

ferent. And I knew all about it, James—I mean—you know—

JAMES

It's a glory, that first fast.

ETHAN

Moses, I felt good! Toward the end I woke up one morning and whilst I was putting on my shoes, what do you think? All to once the idea struck me: "Maybe I'm Messiah himself." I couldn't get it out of my head. Imagine—me!—When I saw the fire and came down again, I was half expecting John to anoint me. Why, there was a cold spot on my forehead for it! —You don't get that again, James.

JAMES

Once in a lifetime is enough.

ETHAN

No! No it's not!

JAMES

Yes—else you'd go crazy of it.—I said I would help you with these sticks. I didn't say I would do it all.

ETHAN

I'll be ashamed to face the new boys, for knowing, as I do, the way that glory'll go out of 'em.

JAMES

There is another that comes in.

ETHAN

It don't compare, though.

JAMES

—The last thing I told my brother was not to get overwrought out there. "It's pretty steady going when you get back," I said, "Not much excitement—just hard work, and plenty of it."

ETHAN

It's that, all right. (*Both are gathering large armfuls of wood.*) This'll do for kindling. There's logs outside.

JAMES

I'll be glad to see him again. He is a very gifted boy. If John sends one to preach in the towns, it ought to be him. You should hear him speak—they'd listen to him, I tell you! They couldn't help it.

ETHAN

It's Jesus he's took the real fancy to. He'll be the one to go, if any does—that is, if he comes back he will—you wait and see.

[*They move toward the entrance at Back with the wood.*]

JAMES

My brother had a first-rate education. We kept him at school long past the time most boys go to work. My father and I, we talked it all over and we decided that a boy with gifts like his ought to have the best education we could buy for him. We figured we could get along without him till he was eighteen. And so we did. And never once have we—

[*JOHN comes in, down Left, followed by ANDREW.*]

JOHN

No sign of 'em yet, James?

JAMES

We've looked high and low, Sir.

JOHN

Is that for the fire?

JAMES

Yes, Sir.

JOHN

Make it a big one.

JAMES

Yes, Sir.

JOHN

And serve up the breakfast. They're ravening.

ETHAN

Our stores are way down, Sir.

JOHN

Give what you can to the poor. Let the devil feed the rich ones. (ETHAN and JAMES go out. JOHN mutters:) Let 'em chew grass and wash it down with wind. Andrew, these newcomers sicken me. When I look at those soft empty faces, I want to vomit—(He takes a bowl and begins to eat his own breakfast.)—I like to see the bones in a face. One of 'em came up to me just now, and what do you think he said? "I must tell you how I enjoyed your sermon."—Enjoyed it!

[ANDREW grins.

ANDREW

The rich have to find pleasure where they can, Sir.

JOHN

If that's redemption, I'd better be selling fish. Sadducees are not my people, Andrew, and never will be. What's more, I see 'em making my own people ill-at-ease. How am I to stave 'em off? I am almost run out of curses.

ANDREW

My opinion is, it's young Hanan brings 'em. I saw him there again this morning with some lord and lady, all dressed fit to kill.

JOHN

The fifth Commandment is hard to keep sometimes.

[ANDREW *grins*.

ANDREW

It is that, Sir.—He's for making a fashion of you.

JOHN

Let him try it.—See here: I have it in mind to send one of you to the towns to act there for me. That may keep 'em home. Well, who's it to be? You?

ANDREW

You know better, Sir. When I face a crowd my belly goes—

[*He flips his hand over and back.*

JOHN

Simon? Nathaniel? James?

ANDREW

We follow you as best we can, Sir. Not one of us could lead anywhere alone.

JOHN

There's good stuff in these four new men.

ANDREW

Baruch I don't think much of.

JOHN

But take James' brother John—there's a bright young fellow.

ANDREW

He is that.—Though I don't believe half he says, I believe the whole of it.

JOHN

And there's Jesus. What about him?

ANDREW

I haven't got him figured out yet.

JOHN

Nor have I. But I know there's more virtue in him than ever I've found in a man before. I preach "Make ready for the Messiah"—Well, there's one made ready as no one else is. He is an example, Andrew, and men live by example as by precept.—Sent out, accredited by me—what do you think?

ANDREW

I don't know.

JOHN

But if I should be taken, who's to carry on my work?

ANDREW

You will not be taken.

JOHN

I may be. I have an ugly nest to clear out soon—Antipas and Herodias. How can Messiah come while their filth spreads down over the whole land?—I must go after 'em, and it is a risky business. Think, Andrew—oughtn't I be provident, eh?—Appoint someone to be prophet in my room?

ANDREW

I don't see the need, Sir.

JOHN

Still, maybe it would be a comfort to have an Elisha by me—a sapling to tend and water and watch grow— (*He laughs.*)—And lean on, maybe—

ANDREW

You lean!

[*A pause.*]

JOHN

What's that caravan, do you know?

ANDREW

Southbound from Jericho, according to the guides.

JOHN

But who?

ANDREW

They didn't say. I didn't want to seem over-anxious.

JOHN

Did you note the coaches?

ANDREW

Yes, there are three of 'em.

JOHN

Patches of canvas over the door-jambs, maybe.

ANDREW

Now that you speak of it, I think there were.

JOHN

And what were they there for? What was under 'em? A crest of some sort, maybe?

ANDREW

It never occurred to me to wonder.

JOHN

You are a trusting soul, Andrew.—Listen: if ever they should come for me, and I am taken of a sudden, tell this Jesus I count on him.

ANDREW

But—(*A brief pause.*) There isn't anyone like you, Sir.

[JOHN *sets down the bowl and wipes his mouth.*]

JOHN

I didn't say there was.—Go along now—take a closer

look at those wagons, and tell me what you find.
[ANDREW *goes to the entrance, Back, in which* HERODIAS *suddenly appears.* ANDREW *stops.*

ANDREW

—Well, Madam, what is it? (*She does not reply.*)
If you—

JOHN

Go on, Andrew.

[ANDREW *hesitates a moment, then goes out.* HERODIAS *advances a few steps into the tent.*

HERODIAS

Baptist.

JOHN

These are my quarters. No one comes here.

HERODIAS

I beg of you, make an exception. It is extremely important.

JOHN

Yes?—And to whom?

HERODIAS

To thousands of poor creatures like me, who have waited long and looked far.

JOHN

For what?

HERODIAS

Redemption.

JOHN

What are you—a harlot?

HERODIAS

Worse.

JOHN

An adulteress, eh?

HERODIAS

Worse.

JOHN

What is worse?

HERODIAS

I am a proper lady. People look up to me. We are esteemed in town.

JOHN

You said “Poor creatures.”

HERODIAS

We are the poorest upon this earth, Sir. All we have stands as a perpetual barrier between us and all we want.

JOHN

Well, I have not much pity for you.

HERODIAS

That is not kind.

JOHN

What is it you want?

HERODIAS

Honest bread, Sir.

JOHN

It is written that when Israel repents, redemption will come about. So my message is a simple one: Repent the sin in you, confess, and forsake it.

HERODIAS

I heard you speaking to your congregation. I saw their faces. I need not tell you you are extraordinary.

JOHN

I come from God: that is extraordinary.

HERODIAS

—And you are impatient for Deliverance, are you not?

JOHN

Deliverance is overdue. But it is around the corner, now.

HERODIAS

Others have said that. There were several in my father's day.

JOHN

They said "Maybe," "Perhaps," "All in good time." I am no man of maybes. *I* say it comes now.

HERODIAS

You are magnificent, John Baptist. You make my heart beat. I take fire of you. I am become a flame, that was dry wood.

JOHN

Your psalms will have small effect in this quarter, Madam. Take 'em to town—happen they'll bring a price there.

[*A brief pause. Then HERODIAS laughs softly.*]

HERODIAS

Forgive me.—It is absurd, eh?—That when a woman craves any sort of grace, she must forever offer this same small coin.

JOHN

It is worse than absurd, Madam. It is ridiculous.

HERODIAS

I quite agree. I am set quick in my place. Thanks.

JOHN

—And good-day.

HERODIAS

Oh, not yet, please!

[*JOHN turns impatiently.*]

JOHN

Who are you, anyhow? What is it you want of me?

HERODIAS

I am a woman full of hope for the redemption of her country. I want from you what I have never had from anyone before: a clear statement of the way redemption may come about. I have heard so many plans—each one more vague—unreasonable than the last. The Rabbis tell us—

JOHN

Agh! Rabbis—

HERODIAS

They do not please you?

JOHN

They are worse than priests, and I hate priests.

HERODIAS

Oh speak to me reasonably, Baptist! We are many, we Sadducees, and our plight is wretched. Do not, I beg of you, exclude us.

JOHN

I exclude no one. I am a great brass tongue, that's all, which God wags as he wishes. Anyone with two ears may hear me.

HERODIAS

Then tell me!—When shall we expect him? And as what?

JOHN

Soon.—And as a king, in glory.

HERODIAS

You mean the Messiah is among us *now*?

JOHN

He who is to become Messiah must be—yes.

HERODIAS

How do you know that?

JOHN

God has told me.

HERODIAS

—Reasonably! Reasonably!

JOHN

—In the days of Herod—what were the plagues and earthquakes, the massacres and famines, but his birth-pangs? Isn't it written that the pangs of the Messiah will come first, to warn us?

HERODIAS

—And that is how you—ah, yes. (*A pause.*) Is he to be a warrior king—?

JOHN

There will be wars.

HERODIAS

Good!—But the country is divided, is it not?

JOHN

He will join it. Israel is God's house. He sends one as master of His house, to set His house in order.

HERODIAS

For whom—the Romans?

JOHN

Hardly.

HERODIAS

But let us be practical. How is Rome to give way, when her armies outnumber us sixty to one?

JOHN

Rome is evil. We shall be good.

HERODIAS

Sixty to one.

JOHN

Good has a potency, Madam. Sixty times sixty.

HERODIAS

That is not practical.

JOHN

It has worked. When one line goes down, there is another behind it. Another and another and another, through cradle into womb.

HERODIAS

Of course, if the men believed that—

JOHN

They will believe it. And the enemy will know it. And the knowledge will breed a palsy in 'em—. I know what I'm talking about. I know soldiers.

HERODIAS

Have you many soldiers in your party?

JOHN

I have marched a little army of 'em through Jordan.

HERODIAS

They seem willing to do as you bid them—

JOHN

I have a way with soldiers.

[*A pause.*]

HERODIAS

You are precisely as I hoped you. You believe the outcome can be forced.

JOHN

What outcome?

HERODIAS

—The end of Roman rule here in Judaea—what else? Listen to me, Prophet: in the Arabs' threat of war on us, our opportunity has come at last. The war, of course, will be small matter, but it can be made much of, and great recruiting carried on without in any way arousing Pilate.

JOHN

I see.

HERODIAS

Our troops will mass south of here, near the border, in Peraea. The fortress of Machaerus will be their base. You must come among them—teach them—plant such faith in their hearts that nothing will seem impossible to them. Will you? That is my husband's caravan, out there. He will provide horses for you.

JOHN

Who is your husband?

HERODIAS

He is a most influential man. We are moving south ourselves. We have a place there.

JOHN

Near Machaerus?

HERODIAS

Quite near. Will you come?

[JOHN *is watching her closely.*

JOHN

I think not.

[*A moment.*

HERODIAS

But surely you realize that such an opportunity cannot be missed.

JOHN

I go where God directs. He has directed me stay here.

HERODIAS

But you take such risks with the authorities here. If they should jail you—

JOHN

Would they dare, eh? What do you think? Would they?

HERODIAS

I see what you mean—imprisonment would only strengthen your support. (*Her eyes narrow. She leans forward.*)—It would, wouldn't it?

JOHN

Yes. So it would. And what of it?

HERODIAS

Baptist, let us be open with one another. I can do much for you in the South. I know the Queen.

JOHN

What queen is that? Since when has there been a queen in the land?

HERODIAS

Herodias is as good as queen.

JOHN

—Of what? A bawdy-house?

HERODIAS

Take care, Baptist! Herodias is—

JOHN

A slut! A queen of sluts! She is Baal's skirt, that woman. (*ANTIPAS enters, Back.*) And who are you? This proper lady's husband, I suppose.

ANTIPAS

Why—er—that is to say—

JOHN

I have counsel for you, good man. Your wife consorts with sluts.

HERODIAS

Oh, this is choice!

JOHN

She is friends with Herodias! Think of it! There's station for you!—But happen you are as lucky. Happen you and the dame's master lean on your elbows and crack nuts together?

ANTIPAS (*to HERODIAS*)

Come at once. The first wagons have already started.

JOHN

I am a great man for messages. I would send one to the Tetrarch and his wench, by friends. Will you bear it?

ANTIPAS

—“The Tetrarch and his—”? (*To HERODIAS.*) Did you hear me? Come at once!

HERODIAS (*to JOHN*)

If you have a message for the Tetrarch, take it to him yourself at Machaerus. Well, what do you say?

JOHN.

I stay here!

HERODIAS

Are you blind, prophet? Your work in this section is complete. Already you have more power than any one man in Judaea.

JOHN

—Than any ten, Madam. And not alone Judaea: Samaria and Galilee, as well. (*A moment. He lowers his head, like a bull.*) Antipas, Herodias, you have done what is not lawful. Repent!

ANTIPAS

What's he talking about?—"Antipas"—

JOHN

Tetrarch, you have taken your own blood to bed. Adultery is not enough, is it? It must be spiced up with incest!

ANTIPAS

Be still, you! Incest, indeed!

JOHN

She is the daughter of your brother Aristobolus and she is your brother Philip's wife—

ANTIPAS

That is—!

HERODIAS

Wait!—You have the names somewhat confused. I was the wife, not of his brother Philip, but of his half-brother, the little Herod.

JOHN

It is the same thing.

HERODIAS

No—but even if it were, surely you understand that in a royal house like ours—

JOHN

I understand that when royal houses rot, commoners' houses fall down about their ears. I have built many little houses and set chairs in 'em. They must stand against Messiah's coming, and no man threaten

them. You stand in my way, you two. You have heard me.

ANTIPAS

When I desire a judgment upon my acts—

HERODIAS

Wait a moment! (*To JOHN.*) What would you have us do?

JOHN

An open sore must heal in the open air. Go to the Temple in sack, with ashes upon your foreheads. Then come and take baptism of me. That done, part company.

[ANTIPAS *laughs*.

ANTIPAS

You are a little crazy, Preacher—and more than a little out of date.—Come, my dear—he believes he is safe here because I have no jurisdiction in Judaea. Well, we shall see—

JOHN

One month from to-day I shall be in camp near Aenon, in your own Galilee. I give you until then.

ANTIPAS

As I live, an ultimatum!

JOHN

Exactly.—Then for each day after that you delay, I shall send out a hundred souls to whom your name is an abomination, your face, a counterfeit coin. I

shall cry you down to thousands, as no sinner ever was cried down before. And that is not all.

ANTIPAS

If you say so much as one word publicly against me—!

JOHN

I shall gush words, Tetrarch. I shall have an issue of 'em!

ANTIPAS

I forbid you!—You have heard me, Herodias! I have forbid him.

JOHN

Come and sit in my juniper-tree with the wagtails: you will hear such chirping as never was.

ANTIPAS

Herodias—!

[He goes out.]

HERODIAS (*to JOHN*)

What I have said to you, I have said. My offer holds.

JOHN

You, Madam, for presuming to come here and bait me, shall die in Spain, where they bait bulls.

[ANDREW appears in the entrance. HERODIAS stares at JOHN for a moment, then suddenly wheels about and goes out. ANDREW enters.]

ANDREW

Nathaniel climbed the look-out, Sir. He's sighted the new men.

JOHN

Where will they come from?

ANDREW

Jem and Baruch and James's brother from the plain.
Jesus, from the hills.

JOHN

All four of 'em, is it?

ANDREW

I hope so, Sir.

[NATHANIEL'S voice is heard from off Left.

NATHANIEL

Andrew! Oh, Andrew!

ANDREW

Yes? Here I am!

NATHANIEL

It's them all right! Three of 'em! They're coming in!

JOHN

—Three.—From where?

ANDREW (*calling*)

Where from?

NATHANIEL

—Plain, beyond the river.

[JAMES and ETHAN enter.

JOHN

Where is the fourth?

ANDREW (*calling*)

What about the fourth?

NATHANIEL

No sign of him yet.

ANDREW (*to JOHN*)

—Maybe to-morrow, Sir.

JAMES

—Any orders?

JOHN

Go man the boat, all of you.

JAMES (*calling*)

Man the boat!

[ANDREW, JAMES and ETHAN run out. JOHN is left alone. He murmurs to himself:

JOHN

Elisha—Elisha—(*A moment.*) Where are you, Sapling? (*He thrusts up his arms, crying:*) Give him up, Mountains! (*A great roar of command:*) Jesus, come down!

[*A moment. Then SIMON runs in and takes a pair of oars from a corner.*

SIMON

They're coming! See 'em clear as day, now!

JOHN

All four, eh?

SIMON

No—one's amiss—just one.—But three's not bad,
now is it? Three's good, *I* say!

[He starts Back.]

JOHN

Wait, Simon! (*SIMON stops.*) Let *them* take the boat
across. We're for the hills, you and me, to find—
(*He stops abruptly, a brief pause. Then he murmurs:*) No—no—

SIMON

Well, Sir?

JOHN

It's all right—go on with them.

SIMON

But—

JOHN

Go on! Go on!

[SIMON goes out. JOHN sinks down upon a bench and sits there staring at the ground and shaking his head.]

Curtain.

ACT THREE

ACT THREE

The Tent, near Aenon, in Galilee. Early morning, a month later.

John's men are finishing their work of setting up the tent. The right side still hangs loose. Throughout the first few minutes of the scene there is great activity both inside and out. JOHN is pacing about repeating over his sermon to himself. DAN hurries in with a great bundle of rushes which he dumps upon the ground, and then hurries out again. SIMON is dragging a rope through a peg in the ground. Others are helping him on the other side of the canvas. SIMON shouts:

SIMON

Hup! (*The canvas stiffens at Left and Right.*) Hup!
(*The canvas is pulled taut at two points.*) That's
right! I've got it! Next one!
[*He fastens the rope around the peg and moves down
to the next peg.*]

JOHN

"There is a Tetrarch here in Galilee who has sinned
against God and the Law—"

SIMON

Hup!

JOHN (*simultaneously*)

"Antipas, the son of Herod—"

SIMON

Hup!

JOHN

—"Antipas, son of that Edomite slave—"

SIMON (*simultaneously*)

Easy, there! Easy!

JOHN

"—has took a cue from his father, and brought a new wife to bed." (*DAN enters with another bundle of rushes.*)—Nathaniel here yet?

DAN

Not yet, Sir.

JOHN

Send him quick, when he comes.

DAN

Right, Sir.

[*He goes out. JOHN continues to pace out his sermon, his lips moving silently.*]

SIMON

Now then—again!—Easy! (*The rope breaks.*) Agh! You blasted, good-for-nothing—wait! Wait a minute! (*The canvas stiffens.*) I say wait!

[*He goes out Back, as ANDREW and JAMES enter, carrying a large chest. ANDREW'S end of the chest drops. He raises it again.*]

ANDREW

Get under it! Get under, will you?

JOHN

Over here, James.

JAMES

Right you are, Sir.

[*They put the chest in place. ETHAN enters, nursing his right arm. He does not see JOHN.*

ETHAN

If there's any more bread to be cut, someone else cuts it.

[*JOHN turns upon him.*

JOHN

Why so? What's the matter with you fellows?—Does one all-night march take all the guts you've got?

ETHAN

I—I'm sorry, Sir. I didn't know you was—

JOHN

Never mind! Get the bread cut.

ETHAN

—Breakfast for how many, Sir?

JOHN

Four hundred.

ETHAN

—In one day, Sir?

JOHN

At least that. (*He calls through the tent.*) Dan! Simon! (*They crowd into the entrance at Back.*)

This is no ordinary week we're facing. Haven't I sent Nathaniel on ahead of me?—Have I ever done that before? This is Galilee, do you understand?

SIMON (*to DAN*)

Didn't I tell you?

JOHN

—So get busy. I expected we'd be in and pitched three hours ago.

ETHAN

Yes, Sir.

DAN

Right, Sir.

SIMON

Here we go, boys—

[*He enters as the others go out, and goes to another tent-peg.*]

JOHN

“There is a Tetrarch in Galilee who has sinned against God and the Law—”

SIMON (*calling off Right, through the tent*)

Leave that for last! Fetch a new rope, someone. Heave here! (*The tent stiffens at the place where the rope broke.*) Here, I say!—Take hold onto it. Heave now—hup! That's right. Hup! Now get on the next one. (*He fixes the peg.*) Next! *This way!*

[*JAMES enters with more rushes and dumps them on the ground. JOHN kicks them into place as he talks on:*]

JOHN

“—Antipas, son of the Edomite Herod, has took a cue from his father, and brought a new wife to bed—” (*To JAMES.*) Where’s your brother?

JAMES

Coming with the wood, Sir.

[*JOHN nods. JAMES goes out.*]

JOHN

—“The wife, Herodias, had *his* father for a grandfather, d’you understand? What’s more, she had his brother for a husband—”

[*The rope is pulled from the other side of the tent.*]

SIMON

Hup! That’s right. Hup! That’s right. Hup! That’s right. (*He fixes the peg and moves to another.*) Here we are!

[*JOHN ZEBEDEE enters with a bundle of wood. He is a boy of twenty, with a fine sensitive face, quick in his movements, inclined to diffidence, with a sur-face of bravado to cover it.*]

JOHN

“—According to the Law, Leviticus, fourth chapter, sixteenth verse—” (*He turns to JOHN ZEBEDEE who is going out again.*) Zebedee—

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Yes, Sir?

JOHN

—What ails you, Zebedee?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Why nothing, Sir.

JOHN

Look here—(JOHN ZEBEDEE *looks at him.*) I cannot have any half-heartedness about me, Son—not these days.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

I don't think I suffer from that complaint, Sir.

JOHN

What is it, then?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

I don't know that there's anything.

JOHN

—Unless you are to be with me heart and soul, I would rather you had done what Jesus did, and not have come back at all. It's no bed of roses, this work, and never will be.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

It isn't the hard work troubles me.

JOHN

What does?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

I don't quite know.

JOHN

Try it another week. Talk it over with your brother —James is a wise man. Then if you are still unhappy

and want to go, I shan't think any the less of you.
(ANDREW enters.)—What is it, Andrew?

ANDREW

It crossed my mind we might run into trouble with that outfit up the river.

JOHN

What outfit's that?

ANDREW

There's a camp of some sort there on the high ground. You can make out a tent with banners up—most likely some kind of circus.

JOHN

Come and we'll see—

[*He goes out Back. ANDREW follows him. DAN re-enters.*]

ETHAN

—It couldn't be another preacher, could it?

DAN

Here? Who, for instance?

SIMON

It's a big circus, that's what. Confound the lot of 'em.

[*ETHAN and JAMES enter, with a basket of beans to be shelled.*]

DAN

Big? One tent?—Have you forgot that troupe of dirty Arabs that came to Bethsaida our second stop

there? They had five tents, and much good they did 'em.

JAMES

They wanted to make trouble, though.

DAN

So will these, maybe, when they see no one's coming. But it ain't our fault they're here, is it? Let 'em move up the creek a ways—they and their sinful women and two-headed calves in bottles. (*A pause. Then thoughtfully.*) Where do they find those things, d'you suppose?

SIMON

My father had a mare once, and she foaled proper and reasonable three seasons running. Then what do you think happened?

DAN

What?

SIMON

She died.

DAN

Agh!

ETHAN

What kind of country is this, anyway? I've never been this far south before.

SIMON

No?—Well you can believe me, over beyond those hills sits two of the busiest little towns this side of

Jericho.—And when they hear the Tetrarch's up for judgment, rain or shine they're not going to miss it—not them.

DAN

But will they dare come out?

ETHAN

Is it true that she is his brother's wife?

SIMON

Herodias?—Of course she is.

JAMES

—*Was*.—They were divorced in Rome.

DAN

They say that in Rome anyone with money can be divorced in three days.

SIMON

Three days is long for it.

JAMES

The Tetrarch's sin is an abomination.

SIMON

Better than that, it is of the sort John deals with best. (*To* ETHAN.)—And you wondering if a mean little four hundred'd come out his first day at 'em.

DAN

What time is it, anyhow?

ETHAN

It must be half-past.

JAMES

It is after that.

DAN

—Not many on hand yet—first row ain't filled even.

SIMON

They know what's coming to-day and won't chance it in twos and threes. If there's trouble, it's the lonely ones'll get taken up as our supporters. They know that, too. (*He goes to the entrance Back and looks out.*) They'll come out, the lot of 'em, all at once in one big crowd, you see. Hello!—Is that Nathaniel?

[ETHAN, JAMES and DAN go to the entrance.

JAMES

Where?

ETHAN (*simultaneously*)

It's time he got here.

DAN (*simultaneously*)

John wants him right away.

SIMON

Wait a minute!—He's talking to those two in the front row.

JAMES

They are the two who have followed us from Jericho. I recognize them.

SIMON

I believe you're right—got up as farmers this time.
That's good, that is.

DAN

—And the other four behind 'em—see? They've got the same soldier-look about 'em, for all their workman's clothes.

SIMON

—Six, is it?—Well, boys, maybe we're going to need our arms to-day for something but baptizing. Me—
—I'm agreeable.

JAMES

Sit down—all of you! They are coming with him—he is bringing them. (*They seat themselves at their various tasks.*) That's it—look peaceful now—calm—
—busy—

DAN

I'm meek as any lion, I am.
[*He begins to whistle over his bean-shelling.*]

SIMON

I wouldn't hurt one of the Tetrarch's flies.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Quiet! Quiet!

[JAMES begins to hum a psalm to himself. The OTHERS take it up, SIMON occasionally interjecting a few of the words. NATHANIEL enters with the two GUARDS of Act One. They are now dressed in rough farm-clothes.]

SIMON

Ah—good morrow, brother.

DAN

Welcome to our peaceful midst, gentle Nathaniel.

JAMES

You bring friends with you, brother?

NATHANIEL

These two—(*He turns to them.*)—farm-hands, did you say you were?—

[*The GUARDS speak with an unconvincing rustic accent.*]

FIRST GUARD

Aye, Sar.

SECOND GUARD

Farm-hands—that's it.

NATHANIEL

—These two pious tillers of the soil are so anxious to hear the Baptist, they have dropped everything and come an hour before time.

SIMON

They will be rewarded for their piety.

NATHANIEL (*to the GUARDS*)

—Look around a bit, would you like to?—Here are the disciples, preparing breakfast—a fine lot of men, eh?

FIRST GUARD

They appear very fine, Sar.

NATHANIEL

They've travelled, this crew—and they're going to travel further. How'd you like to join up, and come along?

FIRST GUARD

Why—er—I dunno ef—

NATHANIEL

I suppose it's a bad season for you—got your corn to bring in, haven't you?

SECOND GUARD

That's it, Sar.

NATHANIEL

—And flocks of sheep to shear, as well.

FIRST GUARD

—Big flocks. We couldn't come now—no, not now. Later on, mebbe—

SIMON (*roaring*)

—And since when was harvest and shearing done at this time of year?

FIRST GUARD

Why, Sar—as a matter of fact—

SECOND GUARD

How's that, Sar?

SIMON

What are you after?

NATHANIEL

—At Jericho you were got up as beggars, at Betharaba, clerks. When I left Salim four days ago, the last thing I saw was you two—you were fishermen there. Why do you change your clothes so often?

SIMON

That's what *I* want to know.

FIRST GUARD

Ye be mistook in us, Sar.

NATHANIEL

Oh no we're not.

SIMON

Farmers!—They'd ought to have wisps of hay stick-in' out, to finish off with.

DAN

If they're farmers I'm a Captain of the Guards.

FIRST GUARD

You are mistaken. We—

SIMON

I'll tell you what you are: you're the foulest pair of Herodian informers ever I laid eyes on. You're almost as good at spying as I'd be at writing books. Lord A'mighty!—Don't we merit a better pair than you two?

FIRST GUARD

I don't know what you're getting at, but—

NATHANIEL

No?—Well, I'll make it plainer.—We're by nature a peaceful lot, but if any harm threatens the Baptist, we turn into tigers, see?

SIMON

—That's when we love a fight, and Herodians are just our dish.

NATHANIEL

—So take that to heart and don't forget it.

JAMES

—And recollect, Sirs—it is not put upon anyone to obey Herodians unless they be in the uniform.

DAN

—No—and if you show warrants on us, we just can't read. See?

SECOND GUARD

Ye be much mistook.

NATHANIEL

Agh, get out!—Remember we've warned you, that's all.

[*The GUARDS go out.*]

SIMON

There are four others, Nathaniel.

NATHANIEL

I saw them.—Where's John?

JAMES

He will be back directly.

DAN

Farmers!—You did a good job there, Nathaniel.

ETHAN

He did, that.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

I think it was a mistake.

[NATHANIEL turns to him and JOHN ZEBEDEE advances. They confront each other. JAMES interposes:]

JAMES

How did it go in town, Nathaniel?

NATHANIEL (*watching JOHN ZEBEDEE*)

It went all right.

JAMES

Will there be many out, do you think?

NATHANIEL

We'll soon know. (*To JOHN ZEBEDEE.*) What was a mistake?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

—Stirring it up with those Herodians.

NATHANIEL

Maybe I should have left 'em to you.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

You know what I mean.

NATHANIEL

No. Tell me.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

I think this entire move against the Tetrarch is a mistake, if you ask me.

NATHANIEL

—And has someone asked you?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

I think so anyway. It's a—

JAMES

Steady there, brother—steady, boy.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

I do!—If I understand our mission at all, it is to prepare unto the Lord a perfect people, and not to be forever threatening, attacking, damning, this way.

SIMON

There is a deal of wickedness to be driven out of men's souls yet, young fellow.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

—And when we've driven it out—if we can—what then?

JAMES

The soul of man is virtuous, when free of sin.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

The soul of man is nothing when free of sin. It is a ploughed field, that's all.

SIMON

—Clear it of the weeds and virtue will grow there. Don't *I* know?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Well, I say if you plant virtue in a soul, and tend it, it will choke the weeds there of itself.

ETHAN

Say, what's the matter with you, anyway?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

I want to tend virtue awhile—and let sin be!

DAN

—Let it *be*!?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Yes!

JAMES

You don't understand my brother.

DAN

I understand he talks too much.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

—Thinks too much, maybe!—For you, at least.

NATHANIEL

Yes—Jesus was that way. You'd better go join him. I hear he's preaching on his own account now.

SIMON

What's that!?

ETHAN (*to JOHN ZEBEDEE*)

You've been corked up for days. Why don't you pour a cup?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

I shall.—I say that John could occupy himself to better ends than laying bare the vices of a lecherous old fool like Antipas—that's all.

NATHANIEL

James, I begin to think your young brother is in the wrong bed here.

DAN

—Criticizing your own master—that's fine, that is.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

—Can any of you tell me what's to be gained by attacking Antipas, beyond a term in prison?

ETHAN

—Prison—maybe you're just a mite concerned for your own skin—is that it?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

I'll prove to you if it is, at any time you say.

JAMES

Shame! Shame on you both!

NATHANIEL

Now look here, lad: there's none of us has got anything against you. You're a bright youngster. We know you've got learning most of us haven't, and we respect it. But all this big philosophizing about virtue—that's for the school-room, not for—

SIMON

—We know what vice is a sight better'n we know

what virtue is. We've got Moses to go on, and we've got the Law.

DAN

What's more, we got the whole Torah to tell us what's an infraction and what ain't.

SIMON

—Yes—and when it *is*, exactly the punishment it calls for. There's the beauty of our religion—each sin has its penalty a'ready set for it.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Oh, what can I do?

NATHANIEL

—Off-hand, I'd say take orders as they're given you, and quit pitting your little intellect against your master's.

JAMES

Yes, brother—for the moment you may do well to leave John's business to John.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

I can't! It's my business too! It is! It's the business of all of us. There's never been a man like John before—I know that—and I know there's no limit to the grace he may bring to Israel. But isn't that in itself reason enough for not letting him take a risk like this? Oh, I realize that to him Antipas is the very type of vice—but the fact remains that for telling that stinking little dog what he can and cannot do, John will be jailed directly. Then all the work he has accomplished goes for nothing.—I only

want to save him for his real work, which *I know is not Antipas!* Antipas is not important—Herodias is not important—(JOHN *comes in Back, followed by* ANDREW.)—you—me, *we* aren't important, except insofar as we can—

JOHN

Would you like to preach in my place this morning, Zebedee?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

I—I beg your pardon, Sir. But—

JOHN

What's wrong?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Why, I—that is, we—

DAN

Not “we,” no.

NATHANIEL

—You—you alone.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

I, then!—Sir, I was saying, it seems to me that—

JOHN

Can you save it till later, Son? Nathaniel—(NATHANIEL *advances quickly.*)—That camp up there—you knew about it?

NATHANIEL

Yes, Sir.

JOHN

What I can't make out, Nathaniel, is why I was not told.

NATHANIEL

I didn't know it myself until last night, Sir.

JOHN

Does he know we are here?

NATHANIEL

I doubt it. We can see his tent only because of the hill.

SIMON

"He"? Who is it?

NATHANIEL

Jesus.

SIMON

—But he don't mean to preach *here!*

NATHANIEL

For five days now, he—

JOHN

How far did you get with your work in town?

NATHANIEL

I did the wharves and markets in the morning and last night, the taverns. I said you meant to have the Tetrarch down from off his high perch like any common sinner.

JOHN

How did they take it?

NATHANIEL

Their mouths hung open at it.

ETHAN

—A fine chance he'll have now!

DAN

Preaching indeed! Who does he think he is?

JAMES (*from the entrance, Back*)

Oh, Sir!

JOHN

Was there any talk of him in town? What's the report on him?

NATHANIEL

It's good.—Of course it's your own doctrine, Sir. There's interest in him, all right—just how much, I don't know.

JOHN

What is it?

JAMES

Here comes the crowd, Sir.

DAN

Let's see! (*He hastens to JAMES's side and looks off Right.*) Ah—ain't that the pretty sight, though! (*To ETHAN.*) Look here—
[*A pause. JOHN stands thinking, silently. Then:*

JOHN

Simon—

SIMON

Sir?

JOHN

Get out there quick—take Jem and Baruch with you—wait for them up the hill at the cross-roads and send as many as will go over to Jesus.

SIMON

What's that you say, Sir?

JOHN

You heard me, didn't you? I think we can spare a few.

SIMON

But who will go?

JOHN

Say it is my request. Go on! Quick!

[SIMON *goes out, calling:*

SIMON

Jem! Baruch!

ETHAN

They'll never make the crossing before 'em—never in this world.

JOHN (*to NATHANIEL*)

What time does he preach as a rule, do you know?

NATHANIEL

I suppose he took your hour.

[*Unnoticed by JOHN, DAN takes a horn from a chest and steps outside the entrance with it.*

JOHN

Whatever prompted me to send you on ahead of me? Except for that, he might have got some of 'em, any-way.

JAMES

Not likely, Sir. Word of you travels fast.

JOHN

—Oh, this is a great, great pity. He will think I came on purpose, to snatch his little following from him.

ANDREW

How could he, Sir?

JOHN

If only a few—if fifty, say, will go over, it will keep heart in him. It is not good for a man to preach to empty benches. (*He is cut short by DAN's horn blast outside. He springs to the entrance.*) Stop that! What's got into you? Put it down—quick!

DAN

Why, Sir—don't I always—?

JOHN

—Not to-day.—Come in here and close that flap.

DAN

But they're almost to the crossing now and Simon and Jem ain't half-way up even.

[NATHANIEL goes to the entrance, parts the flap and stands there, looking out.]

JAMES

—Once on our road, there'll be no turning them away.—I am afraid it is no use, Sir.

[*There is a pause.*]

JOHN

Too bad—too bad—. Well, go out and greet them, Nathaniel. Seat them in close rows. The rest of you move the food over there near the doorway, out of the sun. (ETHAN, DAN, JAMES, JOHN ZEBEDEE and ANDREW carry the baskets of food to the tent-entrance and pile them up beside it. NATHANIEL still stands gazing off Right. JOHN begins to pace up and down again, mumbling his sermon to himself:)
“There is a Tetrarch in Galilee, and he has sinned against God and the Law—”

[*A far-off trumpet is heard. DAN chuckles.*]

DAN

That's him.—Much good that'll do him.

ETHAN

He'll have to blow louder than that.

DAN

—Sounds right forlorn, don't it?

JOHN

“—Antipas, son of Herod, son of that Edomite slave—”

ETHAN (*simultaneously*)

What right's *he* got to preach, anyway? Who does he think he is?

JOHN

"—has took a cue from Herod, and brought a new wife to bed—"

[*He turns to NATHANIEL, who is still standing in the entrance, looking off Right.*

JOHN

Go on, Nathaniel—go on!—And mind you keep a clear space four yards square in front of me. I don't want any crowding up around my knees. I'll walk as I talk to-day, and I must have room—. "—This woman Herodias, the daughter of Aristobolus, was married to the Tetrarch's brother, Philip—"

JOHN ZEBEDEE (*simultaneously, to JAMES:*)

Shall we fill the water-jugs?

DAN

They're full. Leave 'em.

JOHN

"—But advancement did not come quick enough with him, and she had great ambitions—" Nathaniel!

NATHANIEL (*without turning*)

Sir?

JOHN

What ails you, anyhow? Get out there! (NATHANIEL

does not move nor answer. There is a pause.) What is the matter? (*Still NATHANIEL stands silent, and immobile in the entrance, gazing off Right. JOHN goes to his side and follows his eyes. There is a long pause. ANDREW, JOHN ZEBEDEE, JAMES, ETHAN and DAN stand transfixed, waiting. Finally JOHN speaks:*) How is this, Nathaniel?

NATHANIEL

—From the way the town buzzed of him, I was afraid of it, Sir. But I had hoped against it.

[*A pause.*]

JAMES

Might we ask what has happened, Sir?

JOHN

It appears there is another prophet in the land.

ETHAN

Prophet?

DAN

Oh, not *him*, Sir! Surely—

JOHN

—And do you think those hundreds would go from me to any less than a prophet? Do you? Tell me! (*There is a silence. JOHN ponders. Then:*) Are we all here?

ANDREW

All but Simon and Baruch and Jem, Sir.

JOHN

—Tell them also: I want you to take these baskets,

two to a man, and follow that crowd to Jesus.—
Present my compliments to him, offer to help in the baptizing. Say I would be glad if, when the day's work is over, he would come to me here.

[*Reluctantly, the MEN take up the reed baskets.*]

ANDREW

—And your sermon?

JOHN

Leave that to me.

NATHANIEL

But it's not safe to stay alone here. There are two deputies out front. I know that.

ETHAN

At least two.

NATHANIEL

—Herodians, Sir—there's no doubt of it.

JOHN

Leave them to me, also. Go on now! (*The MEN move with the baskets toward the entrance. JAMES and JOHN ZEBEDEE are last.*) One more word—

[*JOHN ZEBEDEE turns. JOHN speaks directly to him:*]

JOHN

If it should be his wish that any of you stay on with him, my permission is already granted. Is that clear? (*JOHN ZEBEDEE looks at him for a moment.*)—All right.—Get along now, fast as your legs will take you. Quick! (*They go out. JOHN is left alone. He takes a deep swallow of water and stands for a mo-*

ment staring down into the cup. He murmurs:) Elisha—Elisha—(*He sets the cup down.*) Almighty, what is this for? Must there be two of us to run before the Lord? Two to proclaim his coming? Am I not enough? (*A pause. Finally he turns, picks up a stout stick, goes to the entrance Back, and places the stick upon a chest, within ready reach. He opens the canvas flap at the entrance and catches it. With his back to the interior of the tent, he stands looking out at the small gathering of men who face him.*) Well, my little congregation, there are not many of you, are there? And such as there be, I don't like the look of—no.—(*The two GUARDS come in noiselessly down Left, and take positions, on either side of the entrance.*) You have big ears, though, haven't you? Well, I shall fill 'em for you. I like the look of you not at all, but it is a day of note, a day of wrath, a day appointed for a purpose—so attend me! There is a Tetrarch in Galilee and he has sinned against God and the Law—(*At this, the SECOND GUARD looks to the FIRST GUARD, who nods. As JOHN continues, they advance cautiously and quietly up behind him. The Curtain begins to fall.*)—Antipas, son of Herod, son of that Edomite slave, has took a cue from Herod—(*The GUARDS are almost upon him.*)—and brought a new wife to bed. This woman, Herodias, had *his* father for a grandfather, d'you understand?—What's more—

Curtain.

ACT FOUR

ACT FOUR

Machaerus—The Living-hall, in the Commander's quarters of a large fortress built by Alexander Tannaeus in the midst of a rugged hollow to the east of the Dead Sea, in southernmost Peraea, close to the Arabian border.

The Living-hall is of stone, with a medium-high ceiling, and is furnished in moderate comfort. In one corner, there is a harp. A door at Right opens into an adjoining room. At Back, a large, arched doorway gives upon a balcony, below which is the dining-hall, a high-vaulted room, the large chandelier of which hangs on the level of the living-hall balcony.

It is early afternoon, two months later.

ANTIPAS is seated beside a table upon which there are maps, an ink-pot and quill-pen, and a plate. He is paring an apple.

SALOME is seated in a chair on the other side of the table, a book in her lap, staring into space. She is about sixteen, awkward in her movements, rather pretty, in a sullen, brooding way.

HERODIAS is at an open window, Right, looking down into a courtyard below.

There is quite a long silence, finally broken by ANTIPAS.

ANTIPAS

Herodias, come away from that window. (A silence.)
Herodias!

[HERODIAS *does not answer. Another silence, then*
SALOME *speaks*:

SALOME

—If there was only something to *do* in this place.—
There's nothing to *do* here.

ANTIPAS

The south meadow was beautiful yesterday—

SALOME

You don't say!—Shall I go make a wreath of daisies
for you?

ANTIPAS

Herodias— (*She does not answer.*) Herodias!

HERODIAS (*without turning*)

What is it?

ANTIPAS

—If he demands this constant watching, put him in
prison—eh? Shall I give the word?

HERODIAS

No.

ANTIPAS

But don't you realize yet that he is—

HERODIAS

—In my charge—yes.

ANTIPAS

Agh!

[*There is a long silence; finally* SALOME *rises and*

stretches, dropping the book from her lap to the floor.

ANTIPAS

Salome—

SALOME (*wearily*)

Yes, uncle—

ANTIPAS (*watching* HERODIAS)

—This holy man who is our honored guest here—perhaps we could coax a miracle out of him.

[*Without interest* SALOME wanders toward the harp in the corner.

SALOME

Do you suppose? (*She seats herself upon a stool by the harp, plucks a chord and sings the scale in an unmusical voice.*) Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah. (*She begins an octave higher.*) Ah-ah-ah-ah- (*She repeats the high note.*) Ah-ah-ah—

HERODIAS

Stop it!

ANTIPAS (*to* HERODIAS)

A bit waspish to-day, eh, my dear?

[SALOME rises and goes back to her chair. Another pause. Then:

SALOME

How old is that deserter they caught?

ANTIPAS

What's that?

SALOME

How old is that deserter that they caught?

ANTIPAS

—Oh—twenty-four or five. Maybe younger. (*To HERODIAS:*)—The sixth, mind you—in one month—and in war-time! (*She does not reply. He continues:*) I tell you there's a spot of corruption in this house, and I know where. What are these strange looks I keep noting? And the time it takes to get an order carried out—what does that mean? *I know!*—And all due to our great concern over a crazy Zealot who had a dozen people listening to him when he was taken—one dozen!

HERODIAS

You judge his following by that single day—why? Because the people there had not yet dared to come out to hear you attacked by him, you think his throat is stopped for good— (*She laughs, shortly.*) You should have waited till the *next* day, Antipas!
[*A pause. Then:*

SALOME

Where is the deserter now?

ANTIPAS

Where he belongs.

SALOME

When does it happen?

ANTIPAS

This evening at sundown.

SALOME (*suddenly and breathlessly*)

I want to see it! Let me see it!

ANTIPAS

No, no—of course not.

SALOME

I must! Take me with you!

ANTIPAS

Your mother won't hear of it.

SALOME

Mother!

HERODIAS

I have told you, no.

SALOME

I must! I must!

HERODIAS

No.

[*A pause. SALOME sinks back into her chair.*]

ANTIPAS

I never look, if I can help it. It is never a pretty sight, and if there is a wind at all, they— (*He covers his eyes.*)—they sway so.

SALOME (*in a breath*)

Oh—beautiful—!

HERODIAS (*sharply*)

Take your book! At once!

[*SALOME picks up the book and thumbs it, distract-*

edly. ANTIPAS begins to eat his apple and to examine the maps again.

ANTIPAS

I don't like the way that regiment of foot turned tail at the first sight of curved knives. I don't like it at all. The Captain can explain till he's blue in the face, but I don't like it. Give those accursed Arabs a few more wins like that, and we shall have 'em upon our necks, and their knives among our bowels. (*He bends closer over the maps.*) Let's see, now: three companies of lancers, one of slings and, say, four hundred horse, south to Tophel—

HERODIAS

What do you want with slings?

ANTIPAS

Well—

HERODIAS

Slings? When you have lancers?

ANTIPAS

Perhaps you could direct the campaign better than I could.

HERODIAS

I have not the least doubt of it.

ANTIPAS

Cleopatra herself, eh?

HERODIAS

Cleopatra's ensign drooped with her breasts. I pin my reliance to something less time-bitten.

ANTIPAS

Your wits, I suppose.

HERODIAS

—Yes. Fortunately there are still Maccabees in the land. There was a cradle or two your father overlooked.

ANTIPAS

Whose? Your brother's?

HERODIAS

Agrippa is small matter.

ANTIPAS

He owes me thirty thousand—beyond that, very small.—And who else is there?

HERODIAS

There is me, Antipas. There is Herodias!

ANTIPAS

Herodias Maccabeus, eh?

HERODIAS

Yes!

ANTIPAS

You've been hinting at some new scheme a good two months, now. Why not come out with it? (*A silence.*) Oh, I know why you married me. Don't think I don't.

HERODIAS

Antipas, are you content to be little Tetrarch all your life?

ANTIPAS

I am content to have my head on my shoulders yet awhile. I fancy it better there than on a post up a side-street in Rome.

SALOME

Uncle, you do say some amusing things.

HERODIAS

I wish you to be king before you die.

ANTIPAS

—And yourself queen. There! It's out!—Well, accomplish it peacefully and I'm willing.

HERODIAS

You know that is impossible.

ANTIPAS

—Tiberius likes me—he likes me very much. I had a letter from him last year from Capri.

HERODIAS

You built a city and named it for him. If that didn't bring you a crown, then what will?

[ANTIPAS *shrugs and returns to his maps.* HERODIAS *goes again to the window.*

SALOME (*reading*)

“Antipater married Kypros, and they had issue: four sons: Phasael, Joseph, Pheroras and Herod”—that's Herod Magnus “—and one daughter, Salome”—that's my great-grandmother. (*She repeats it over silently to herself, her lips moving. Then suddenly*

she says aloud:) Say—what kin are *we* three, any-way?

ANTIPAS

Why do you ask?

SALOME

I just wondered what there was in all this talk.

ANTIPAS

All whose talk?

SALOME

—His—the Baptist's.

HERODIAS

Never mind him!

SALOME

—That's a little difficult, you know, with the whole household taking sides now.

ANTIPAS

Sides? On what?

SALOME

—On you two—whether it's incest, or whether it's not.

[ANTIPAS *rises and turns furiously upon* HERODIAS.]

ANTIPAS

—For the last time: how much longer am I to endure this sort of thing?

HERODIAS

I shall be able to answer that better after my talk with him to-day.

ANTIPAS

“Your talk with him!”—You’ll get just what you’ve got this past month—a string of assorted curses. You must enjoy it.

HERODIAS

Curious, I have a feeling he *will* talk to-day.

ANTIPAS

—Try again to convert *us*, maybe. Well, I’ve had about enough of his proselytizing, too. Confound it, Herodias, this is a garrison, not a synagogue.

HERODIAS

All soldiers fight best in religious wars.

ANTIPAS

—In mutinies they fight best—and that’s what it’ll be! (*A pause.*) What makes you think he’ll talk?

HERODIAS

—New hope of rescue—an avenging army. I know my man, Antipas. He can contain despair, but exultation, he cannot. I have given him a great new chance to lord it over us— (*She laughs.*)—I doubt he can resist it.

ANTIPAS

What have you done?

HERODIAS

This morning I arranged that he should hear of Jesus’s success in Galilee.

ANTIPAS

You—?!

HERODIAS

I wished to puff him up a little higher, before I prick him.

ANTIPAS

—Or he pricks us.

HERODIAS

—If you care to see the wind go out, wait while I tell him the new prophet's doctrines.

ANTIPAS

Let John go, Herodias. He has a host of followers, that man up there. There may be more to the avenging army than you think.

HERODIAS

If it was to come, it would have come by now. A leader who feeds them such pap as "love your enemies" will do small harm, I think.

ANTIPAS

My dear woman, that's obviously a blind, obviously. Any idiot could see through that.

HERODIAS

Hanan has heard him. He is convinced of his sincerity.

ANTIPAS

Hanan is young.

HERODIAS

He *preaches* non-resistance!

ANTIPAS

That's an old ruse with organizers.

HERODIAS

You forget that all men are not so shrewd as you are.

ANTIPAS

Agh!

HERODIAS

He is precisely what he appears to be—a young idealist, more poet than politician. He is the Baptist's direct opposite—and when John learns that, we shall have a different John to deal with.

[In the doorway, Back, appears the thin, rather effeminate figure of a man about sixty. He is carefully dressed, and two masks dangle from his wrist, upon a ribbon. This is the DANCING-MASTER.]

SALOME

I'd like to see this Baptist. I've never seen anyone who even claimed to be a prophet. Why can't I see him? (*The DANCING-MASTER clears his throat politely.*) Oh—you're here.

DANCING-MASTER

—I beg pardon, Majesties—and will the little Princess come for her dancing-lesson now?

SALOME

No, she will not.

DANCING-MASTER

The music is waiting.

SALOME

Let it. What do I care?

HERODIAS

Go at once, Salome.

SALOME

—A dancing-lesson on a day like this?

HERODIAS

Go at once.

DANCING MASTER (*to HERODIAS*)

The little feet grow more nimble daily, Highness. We are much encouraged, are we not, Princess?

SALOME

Maybe you are. (*Appealingly.*) Mother— (*HERODIAS peremptorily indicates the door. SALOME moves toward it, grumbling.*) I'll come out in spots again, I know I shall.

DANCING-MASTER

Tush, little Princess. Royal blood is always cool.

SALOME

My faith, how the man bores me.

ANTIPAS

Shut the door. I don't want that silly music in my ears.

[*SALOME goes out, followed by the DANCING-MASTER. HERODIAS goes to ANTIPAS. A door is heard to close off Right, at Back.*]

HERODIAS

Antipas, it is time we had this out once and for all.

ANTIPAS

Oh, you and your vague schemes—

HERODIAS

Vague?—I have not one jewel left. Hanan has spent his entire patrimony. Between us we have stored arms and ammunition for seventy thousand.

ANTIPAS

You—?! Where—?

HERODIAS

In Sepphoris, principally.

ANTIPAS

Wait till Pilate gets wind of your arsenals.

HERODIAS

Pilate will not.

ANTIPAS

Well—since when have weapons wielded themselves?

HERODIAS

This threat from the Arabs is sent from Heaven—you can raise legion upon legion against them, and no one question it. (ANTIPAS *does not answer.*) You have the occasion: this new tax and census. Above all, you have the essential to any victory—a popular leader—in this case, a leader made to measure—John is an accredited prophet and a national hero. What *do* you lack, Antipas?

ANTIPAS

John's whole idea is religious.

HERODIAS

Religion and politics are one here.

ANTIPAS

I can see John anointing you and me. He hates us.

HERODIAS

He has received a wrong impression of us. I shall correct that.

ANTIPAS

If you can.

HERODIAS

I can do what I will—and I can make others do so.

ANTIPAS

Ambitious.

HERODIAS

I know I have a life to live. I know that beyond it there is nothing. I shall make of my life what I can.

ANTIPAS

—Yes—even to making confounded quick work of it.

HERODIAS

I don't measure along, as you do. I measure down.—
Well, what do you say? King and conqueror—or this little official post and a slave's haven?

ANTIPAS

Listen: I have wits too, and don't you forget it.

HERODIAS

Then display them. I should like you to show me something but truce-flags.

[*A moment. Then:*

ANTIPAS

How's this: You release John. He goes straight to Galilee. He joins up with Jesus. They combine their followings. Hanan, with one eye on Pilate, puts 'em under arms. You see?

HERODIAS

Perfectly.

[*ANTIPAS moves objects upon the table in various directions, to illustrate his plan.*

ANTIPAS

I continue to mass troops here, supposedly against the Arabs. That will clean a large part of the Roman soldiery out of Jericho and Jerusalem. So far, so good?

HERODIAS

Oh, excellent!

ANTIPAS

John puts the quietus on Pilate.—I'll have my troops three days' march southward before the news reaches me. John's army sets out to meet the Romans coming down from Antioch. I swing my troops about—my Jewish troops, that is—supposedly in pursuit. The day after the first encounter we arrive—the day *after*—

HERODIAS

—When the outcome is quite clear— (ANTIPAS *nods excitedly.*) Oh, your precious, precious head—

[*In a burst of temper he knocks over the objects he has been manoeuvring upon the table.*]

ANTIPAS

It will be done my way or not at all!

[*A snatch of a dance-tune played by harp, flute and fiddle, is heard briefly from below in the Dining-hall, as a door off-Right, at Back, is opened and closed again.*]

HERODIAS

—And who leads the Roman armies, do you think?
A child upon a cock-horse?

ANTIPAS

And who can persuade the Baptist to come over!

HERODIAS

Leave the Baptist to me. Mass your troops, Antipas,
mass your troops!

ANTIPAS

Confound you!—Even if he does, can he work miracles? Can he smite whole legions with paralysis?

[HANAN *appears in the doorway, Back.*]

HERODIAS

He says so.

ANTIPAS

What do you mean? (*He sees HANAN.*) Well, what is it?

HANAN

They are bringing him up now—is that agreeable to your Excellencies?

HERODIAS

Yes, quite—

ANTIPAS (*to HERODIAS*)

—Then let him give me a sample of his art. I have an old censer from the First Temple—there's still incense in it. If he can draw down fire, say, the way Elijah could—

HERODIAS

Wouldn't you rather he took some lemons from your beard?

[*The GUARDS bring JOHN into the doorway.*]

HERODIAS

Ah—come in, Baptist. (*To the GUARDS:*) We shall ring for you—

[*The GUARDS go out. JOHN enters.*]

JOHN

Well, my hosts, I take it the news from the North has come to your ears, too.

ANTIPAS

What news is that?

[*JOHN sees HANAN.*]

JOHN

Hanan! What joy the sight of your face gives me!—So we're all together again, eh? Is it possible you have decided to turn me loose while there's still time?

HERODIAS

We shall speak of that.

JOHN

You'd do well to speak quick. Doom rides fast horses down from Galilee.

ANTIPAS

What's happening in Galilee?—Oh yes, yes—lucky you had one to fill your shoes so promptly, wasn't it?

JOHN

Unlucky for you, Antipas.

ANTIPAS

That depends on how you look at it.

JOHN

I look straight into it.

ANTIPAS

What about this Jesus?—Is he really the brilliant lad they say?

JOHN

I knew what stuff was in him the minute I laid eyes on him! I knew it! What no one else could see, I saw. (*He laughs exultingly.*)—That was two months ago, when no one had ever heard of him.

ANTIPAS

Two months, of course, is nothing to a prophet.

JOHN

—I said to myself, "If I am taken—and I may be

taken—here's one will carry on John's work well nigh as well as John himself could"— Was I right? Eh? Was I?

HERODIAS

—And how long will those who have heard the master be willing to attend a pupil?

JOHN

As long as need be. His words are my words.

ANTIPAS

—And any echo magnifies the voice, eh?—any shadow fattens the form that casts it. John *in extenso*—most interesting—most—

JOHN

—Most dangerous to you, Tetrarch.

ANTIPAS

Oh? How do you make that out?

JOHN

I am held here: how long will it be, do you think, before he comes for me?

ANTIPAS

Well, if you ask me, I think it will be forever.

JOHN

Wait, then.

ANTIPAS

Unfortunately, I am mortal.

HERODIAS

And hasn't it occurred to you that your release may be the last thing he desires?

JOHN

—Nor will it, Madam. *You* wait, also.

HERODIAS

It seems we have heard somewhat diverse reports of him. I gathered that far from being a devout disciple, he is your rival.

JOHN

Then I wish I had more like him—to shout my doctrine everywhere at once.

HERODIAS

He has gutted your doctrine. What is left, he serves as a confection made nicely to the public taste. It slips more easily down throats and gives the poor folk who take it a sweet sense of self-importance. That is his success.

JOHN

You lie serenely, Madam, but without persuasion.

HERODIAS (*to HANAN*)

You have heard him, have you not?

HANAN

I have heard every public utterance he has made since his Baptism.

HERODIAS

—And you remember it all in clear detail?

HANAN

I have not forgot a word.

HERODIAS

—Then I should be glad if you would correct me where I fall into error. (*To JOHN.*) At first he taught your doctrine to the letter—that's quite true. But now he speaks with no authority save his own—not Heaven's, nor yours—*his own*. The kingdom comes—ah yes—the Kingdom is all but here. But it is not an actual Kingdom—oh no—it is a kind of little dream, a pale imagining that is to have its being within the lowly and the mournful and the meek—*within* them, mind you! It is not much, this Kingdom, but it is for them alone, they are the great people of the earth, and they shall rule it—in their imagining. It is a safe doctrine, is it not?

ANTIPAS

—Even Pilate can't take exception to that.

HERODIAS

—Needless to remark, his congregations love him: they have not ever felt so big before. It is pleasant, when one lacks courage, to have meekness made a virtue. Ah yes—it is to be all love and peace—and in a twinkling, by his say-so.

[ANTIPAS *smiles*.

ANTIPAS

“All love and peace.”

HANAN

Imagine it!

HERODIAS

And listen, Baptist—this is for you: be politic and bow to Rome! Pay your taxes without complaint, cherish no grudge. No more of this eye-for-an-eye. If your enemy strike you on one cheek, present the other. Keep peace—peace at whatever cost! It is the peacemakers he blesses, not the warriors. Love your enemies, you Jews, love them! For are not all men brothers—Greeks, Romans, Jews alike?

JOHN

You expect me to believe a man of mine spoke so to Jews?

HERODIAS

—And speaks so daily, to thousands of them.

HANAN

He couldn't serve Rome better if he were on Pilate's pay-roll.

ANTIPAS

Maybe he is—that'd be nothing new.

JOHN

You are a sweet pack of liars, aren't you?

HERODIAS

—Then why are so many of your own men against him? Four have joined him—four only.

[HANAN *consults a note.*

HANAN

James and John Zebedee, Simon and Andrew. The others are still faithful.

JOHN

There is no question of fidelity about it!

HANAN

—They seem to feel there is. At any rate, they maintain a separate camp—and that, in face of all his great talk and promises and so-called wonder-working.

ANTIPAS

Wonder-working?

HANAN

Word went about he'd got Simon's wife's mother up from a fever.

JOHN

And had he not?

[HANAN *shrugs*.

HANAN

Perhaps.

ANTIPAS

What's this, Hanan?

HANAN

I saw the woman, Excellency. I'm convinced she would have got well anyway.

JOHN

—And those he cured of a possession—what about them? Would they have got well?

HANAN

Any of the high Chasidim can cast out devils. They do it every day.

HERODIAS

His trip through Galilee was like a holiday, was it not?

HANAN

Precisely—what with the feasting on every occasion, and—

JOHN

Feasting! What are you talking of?

HERODIAS

—With publicans, even—can you believe it?

JOHN

No—nor do I.

HERODIAS

It is true, however.

ANTIPAS

Pilate's tax-officials are famed for their good tables.

JOHN

Publicans are traitors! They are unclean! "Feasting with publicans"—to me, whose disciples fast, as I have taught them, four days in seven!

HANAN

He has been quizzed on that. From what he said, I

gathered he counts most of what you taught well out-of-date now.

HERODIAS (*watching JOHN*)

In fact, from all reports, this latest, littlest voice of God still wants instruction.

JOHN

How many more of these beads have you to string?
I am a busy man, even in prison.

[*A silence. Then:*

HERODIAS (*to ANTIPAS*)

If you please—

[*ANTIPAS rises and turns to JOHN:*

ANTIPAS

—Baptist, you may not have the gift of wonders, but you're a miracle of stubbornness, I'll say that for you. (*To HERODIAS.*) Madam, I am with you in this at last. If he cannot move mountains, at least they cannot move him. Come along, Hanan—

[*He and HANAN go out. JOHN rises.*

JOHN

I think I have had enough of you for one day.

HERODIAS

You still pretend to believe nothing you have heard?

JOHN

I pretend to know lies when I hear 'em.

HERODIAS

We have told you the simple truth. Whatever you say, it must be plain to you that hope of rescue is

gone entirely: you are quite helpless now—you, the great John Baptist—or ought I to say “the once great”?

JOHN

You will see if you ought.

[The door below is opened again, and a dance-tune begins to be heard.]

HERODIAS

Whatever his success is based upon, a success it is.—And they forget quick, you know.

JOHN

Not me, they don't. Even if they should, I'd bark 'em up again soon enough.

HERODIAS

Still heaven's own hound, eh?—But the chase of the Messiah is a long chase, is it not? He has already spent pack on pack.

JOHN

—Let him. Then I may bring him down alone.

[The voice of the DANCING-MASTER is heard droning up from the dining-hall in time to the music.]

DANCING-MASTER

—Around and around and around and around. Raise mask, drop mask, and around and around—
[HERODIAS talks through it.]

HERODIAS

True, you may. There has never been throat so full, nor such fast feet. I except no one, John—not even

Dog Elijah. You might flush a whole covey of Messiahs—if you could hold the scent.

DANCING-MASTER

—Around and around and around and around—
heel, toe and around. Raise mask and around and
around, drop mask and around—

[JOHN'S *question* and HERODIAS' *reply* are spoken
through it:

JOHN

And have I ever dropped it?

HERODIAS

—A hundred times. The little sins that run across it
—they are so fascinating to your nose. Merciful
heaven—what are such mice to you?

[*The DANCING-MASTER'S voice is now silent, but the
music continues.*

JOHN

Adultery and incest—mice, eh?

HERODIAS

—And small mice! They have their cats and terriers.
Your concern is not for one man's soul, or two, but
for a nation's.

JOHN

I know my religion: from where sin dwells, no good
comes out.

HERODIAS

Religion! Morals, you know. There's one realm in
which your pupil is your master. For him, sin exists

only for forgiveness' sake—forgiveness! Learn of him.

JOHN

I learn of God—and I say you are pure evil.

HERODIAS

My purpose is not.

JOHN

Happen I don't know your purpose.

HERODIAS

You know I am a Maccabee.

JOHN

Edomite blood is in you also.

HERODIAS

The other has drowned it deep.

DANCING-MASTER

—Around and around and around and around. Raise mask, drop mask and around and around—

JOHN (*ironically*)

Can it be that I have a patriot in my eye?

HERODIAS

I have in my heart one purpose: the restoration of the Kingdom—

JOHN

It is beyond me.

HERODIAS

No—you can reach and touch it. Will you—Messiah?

[JOHN *turns upon her.*

JOHN

I am not him!

HERODIAS

That remains to be seen. That is a matter of self-examination and the fulfillment of certain prophecies, which may be easily arranged. John, it is high time we two talked plain affairs. I have armies for you, and arms. It is war, Prophet. If a greater than you is born of it, you may acknowledge him. In the meantime you would do well to leave a queen at home, who, being Maccabee, the people would both venerate and trust.

JOHN (*incredulously*)

Would *you* be queen, Herodias?

HERODIAS

I would have you consider me—to fill the gap before Messiah, in whose favor I should abdicate.

JOHN

—And your lord Antipas—king in the gap, eh?
Herod Second—

HERODIAS

I think he might be more useful, fancying himself king. Well, what do you say?

JOHN

There are no bounds to your audacity.

HERODIAS

None whatsoever.

JOHN

It is a wondrous plan, Madam.

HERODIAS

Then let us proceed at once. I would like to have you here another month—until the Tetrarch's birthday, say. That will offer an occasion for a feast. For guests, we shall select men we can count on. To them, you shall declare your aims. Well, John, we are in tune so far, eh?

JOHN (*watching her*)

When you are in tune with John, a host of little angels will tumble into your lap and lie there, drunk with the melody.

HERODIAS (*sharply*)

What do you mean?!

JOHN

—Madam, when my fiddle and your bow sound anything but discord, the fence of heaven'll crack with it, and Baal himself devour the Lord God with open mouth.

DANCING-MASTER

Around and around and around and around. Heel, toe, heel, toe, and around and around.

[*The music stops with his voice.*]

HERODIAS

So, mouser, you are off again.

JOHN (*roaring*)

Rend your old garments, whore, and lay the oil along your throat, before you solicit *me!*

HERODIAS

—Oil of repentance for my sins—

JOHN

That's it!

HERODIAS

—Or better, water.

JOHN

I think you would foul my Jordan.

HERODIAS

I wish not to misunderstand you: my plan and hopes for the redemption of Israel—they are to you no more than a mean little conspiracy.

JOHN

They are less, Madam.

HERODIAS

—Because they are the plans, hopes of an unrighteous woman.

JOHN

I see sin and deception under your eyelids and evil lurking in the corners of your mouth. Would you persuade me any good could come of such?

HERODIAS

Take care, Baptist, or I may put you away for good and all.

JOHN

But you could not.

HERODIAS

I have you dead on paper now.

JOHN

—I am not frightened as I should be. I have been put away before, and taken up too, and cast down. But you see I am back again.

HERODIAS

You think yourself permanent in the world—there's the secret of your boldness, is it!

JOHN

I have no secrets—happen that is it.

HERODIAS

Do we join forces, or do we not?

JOHN

We do not.

HERODIAS

—If I repent and am baptized—

JOHN

No.

HERODIAS

—Because I'm still rich, eh?—live in luxury, I sup-

pose—regard my pleasure a bit, and suffer no pain I can avoid—therefore I am rotten, rotten!—Is that it?

JOHN

That will do.

HERODIAS

—So the one great chance is to be cast away for nothing but a vain asceticism—a set of petty strictures against petty sins—your peasant's faith that "those in high places" as you call us, must of necessity be and do evil.

JOHN

When King Messiah comes the valleys will be filled and the high hills brought low. There will be one people, of one faith, of one degree. Look to it.

HERODIAS

Oh cease that cant—I'm sick of it!—Wait for an act of God to bring the Kingdom?—And wait forever, I suppose. *I* say it shall be set up here and now! Let be as many messiahs as there are men-at-arms. And as for virtue and repentance—it's slavery breeds sin, my prophet. When Israel is free there'll be more virtue in the land than you can shake a stick at.

JOHN

Happen.

HERODIAS

—Nor will I let this flame of yours beat itself out within a tent, neither. Shall I let the hope of a lifetime go to grave for one man's blindness to himself?

I know who is to be Messiah in this land, and I mean you shall know it— (*She rings for the GUARDS.*) I shall give you one month in solitude to search for him. Alone in a small cell, you shall find him. If, by the Tetrarch's birthday, you have done so, it is the beginning of your glory, as true Messiah. If you have not, it is the end of John Baptist. (*THE GUARDS enter.*) This man goes into prison, by his Excellency's command.

FIRST GUARD

Yes, Excellency.

HERODIAS

—Ground level, on the north side, and alone.

FIRST GUARD

Yes, Excellency.

[*They seize JOHN. SALOME appears in the doorway.*]

SALOME

Heavens! Is this the prophet?—I don't think *he's* much.

JOHN

—Another of the incestuous breed, eh?—How is it with you, little one? Are your bones knit quite together? How many breasts have you?

SALOME

You—!

[*She advances furiously and strikes at him. THE GUARDS take him out.*]

JOHN

Wickedness—wickedness—God blast you utterly!

HERODIAS

One month—God be with you throughout it!

[HERODIAS *and* SALOME *stand looking after him. SALOME is still shaking with rage.*

SALOME

How dared he! How did he dare!

Curtain.

ACT FIVE

ACT FIVE

Machaerus—the Guard-hall. A month later. The night of ANTIPAS' birthday-dinner.

The Guard-hall is a room of the same proportions and plan as the living-hall of Act IV. The entrance is down a broad stairway, through heavy doors at Back. There is another low door, leading down into JOHN'S cell at Right. Both doors are now closed. Except for a bench and table, the room is bare of furniture, and the stone floor is uncovered.

The FIRST and SECOND GUARDS are seated upon a bench near the door at Right. They are silent for a moment and then, at a sound from the room above, the FIRST GUARD looks upward.

FIRST GUARD

—It must be the acrobats, a'ready.

SECOND GUARD

—Acrobats drop quiet. It's the clowns.

FIRST GUARD

They got clowns?

SECOND GUARD

I saw 'em arrivin' yesterday. You should 'a' seen one of 'em's mouth. Like that—

FIRST GUARD

Not so noisy for a birthday-party, though.

SECOND GUARD

Give 'em time.

FIRST GUARD

—The thing that riles me is us two havin' to stay sober, with all that good wine sent down.

SECOND GUARD

Clear heads to-night, Joel.

FIRST GUARD

I suppose so.

SECOND GUARD

The officers' mess got brandy.

FIRST GUARD

Don't tell me.

SECOND GUARD

I bought half-a-skin off'n the third steward and sent it out to the sentries on North Gate.

FIRST GUARD

When was that?

SECOND GUARD

Two hours ago.

FIRST GUARD

Then they're sure to get past *them* safe, eh?

SECOND GUARD

Say, with that much brandy in 'em, the whole Arab army could ride through on camels.

FIRST GUARD

How'll we know it's the right two when they come?
I mean what'll they look like?

SECOND GUARD

Oh, pale an' scrawny, prob'ly—white around the gills—you know the type. John's the only one of the lot I ever see looked halfways human.

FIRST GUARD

I'll bet even he don't, now.—A solid month all alone in that black hole, like a common thief. It ain't right, Pete.

SECOND GUARD

Anyone say it was?

FIRST GUARD

—Nothin' but bread an' water—an' not much of them. It hurts my gut to think of it.

SECOND GUARD

That ain't it—it's the lack of someone to preach at, gets him. He ain't used to that.

FIRST GUARD

He's had a good long time to think of his sins in, ain't he?

[*The SECOND GUARD scowls.*]

SECOND GUARD

His *what*—?

FIRST GUARD

I say he's had a good long—

SECOND GUARD

Well, you be careful what you say, see?

FIRST GUARD

What the—!

SECOND GUARD

Never mind!

FIRST GUARD

Say, I'm for the Baptist just as strong as you are, and don't you forget it.

SECOND GUARD

You don't talk like it.

FIRST GUARD

I don't, don't I?

SECOND GUARD

No, nor act like it.—Where'd you spend last night again?

FIRST GUARD

What's that to you?

SECOND GUARD

—Not a thing. If when the big day comes you want to be damned with the rest of 'em, go right ahead.—Only remember that day ain't so far off now, Joel. Remember that—

FIRST GUARD

You're a good one to talk.

SECOND GUARD

I ain't sayin' nothin'. Only remember it ain't so far off. Just remember that.

FIRST GUARD

I'm gonna be among the saved!—Ain't I confessed? Ain't I baptized?

SECOND GUARD

Then speak of the Baptist more respectful. What little chance you got of being saved depends on him.

FIRST GUARD

Didn't he say we was his own disciples now—same as the ones that're comin' to-night—didn't he?

SECOND GUARD

He said *I* was. Prob'ly you was included.

FIRST GUARD

Yes, prob'ly I was! (*A pause.*) Say Pete, we mustn't make no mistakes about these two to-night.

SECOND GUARD

One of 'em's named Simon—I know that. And when I say to him "What have *you* come for?" he's to say "Redemption." It's all arranged, so calm yourself.

FIRST GUARD

The thing that worries me is how to keep the rest of the comp'ny out of here. They're rovin' everywhere. Did you note that new outfit came in this morning?

SECOND GUARD

First Lancers, wasn't they?

FIRST GUARD

And don't they know it! They'll be for lookin' the whole place over to find a fit spot for 'em to sleep in.

SECOND GUARD

We got orders to let no one by—that's easy. What's a' matter?

FIRST GUARD

Wait a minute—I heard something.

[He goes to the door, Back, and peers sideways through the slot in it.]

SECOND GUARD

Aw, sit down.

FIRST GUARD

This gives me the creeps, Pete. Fact. It don't lack more'n ten minutes of the next watch. What if they don't get here before?

SECOND GUARD

It's the next watch now, you fool. They're drunk and we're takin' it for 'em.

FIRST GUARD

We're—?

SECOND GUARD

You heard me.

FIRST GUARD

—But how's what's-his-name—Simon an' the other one to know *we're* all right?

SECOND GUARD

That's up to them.

FIRST GUARD

I got a feelin' you an' me's goin' to pay good for this, Pete.

SECOND GUARD

What payin's to be done, the second watch'll do.
[*There is a knock on the door, Back.*]

FIRST GUARD

Look out! (*The SECOND GUARD moves cautiously to the door and peers through the slot.*) Who is it?

SECOND GUARD

A couple of the Lancers.

FIRST GUARD

Didn't I tell you?
[*The knock is repeated.*]

SECOND GUARD

Shhhh! Quiet!
[*The knock is repeated.*]

FIRST GUARD

You got to let 'em in, Pete. (*The SECOND GUARD motions him to be silent.*) They'll report to the Cap'n. (*The door is tried.*) Honest, Pete—where'll we be then?

[*Carefully and noiselessly the SECOND GUARD slides open the bolt and returns to the FIRST GUARD. He seats himself upon the floor.*]

SECOND GUARD

Down here—quick! (*The FIRST GUARD seats himself facing him. The SECOND GUARD dumps a small bag of coins upon the floor between them.*) Now roll 'em out—

FIRST GUARD

What? Oh—

[*From his pocket he brings out a leather cup of conical shape and three dice.*

SECOND GUARD

Roll 'em out—roll 'em out! (*The FIRST GUARD shakes and casts the dice. The knock is repeated. The SECOND GUARD bawls toward the door:*) Well, open it why don't you? (*The FIRST GUARD casts again. The door is opened and SIMON and JOHN ZEBEDEE enter in ill-fitting uniforms. The SECOND GUARD mutters:*) What do they think this is?

[*The FIRST GUARD picks up the dice.*

SECOND GUARD

Hey, gimme those dice! I seen that! You threw a dog.

FIRST GUARD

I did?

SECOND GUARD

Three aces.

FIRST GUARD

One was a deuce.

SECOND GUARD

Three, I tell you!

FIRST GUARD

A deuce, plain as—

SECOND GUARD

Say, have I got eyes, or ain't I?

FIRST GUARD

If you read a deuce for an ace you're blind in one of 'em.

SECOND GUARD

Give 'em here! (*He takes the dice and shakes them in the cone. JOHN ZEBEDEE advances to him.*) Now watch 'em, boy—

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Good evening to you.

[*The SECOND GUARD puts down the cone and looks contemptuously at ZEBEDEE.*]

SECOND GUARD

Well, if it ain't a pair of guardsmen.

FIRST GUARD

First Lancers, too, or I'm a bastard.

[*SIMON advances.*]

SIMON

"Or," did you say?

FIRST GUARD

My—talks right up, don't he? With the Lancers sent

down, they must expect a real war from this little sally of the Arabs.

SECOND GUARD

That's all right, but they can't stay here.

SIMON

We have business here.

SECOND GUARD

Oh? What is it?

SIMON

Where's your prisoner?

FIRST GUARD

He don't look like no Lancer to me.

SIMON

I say, where's your prisoner? Where's John Baptist?

SECOND GUARD

Why? What about him?

FIRST GUARD

—He stands like he was in a boat, and look at that jacket.

SECOND GUARD (*to JOHN ZEBEDEE*)

You don't say much. What're you here for?
[A brief pause. Then:

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Redemption.

[The FIRST GUARD starts up.

FIRST GUARD

You—?!

SECOND GUARD

Wait a minute!—What's your name?

SIMON

Mine is Simon.

[*A silence. THE GUARDS are unconvinced.*]

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Are you the guards for the prisoner John Baptist?

SECOND GUARD

We are. Where'd you get those uniforms?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

We took them from two men drunk in a ditch on the road from the village.

SECOND GUARD

Shoot the bolt, Joel. (*The FIRST GUARD bolts the door.*) Well, I'm certainly glad to see you.

FIRST GUARD

We'd about give you up.

SIMON

Let us go to him!

SECOND GUARD

Go fetch him, Joel.

[*The FIRST GUARD goes to the door, Right, takes keys from his belt and unlocks it.*]

SIMON

You are good fellows, you two.

SECOND GUARD

Oh, that's all right. Just don't let him forget us on the Big Day, will you? This is Joel here, and I'm Pete—Corporal and Sergeant, Comp'ny A, Sixth Foot.

SIMON

—If either of you believes he has a devil, I shall be glad to cast it out for him. I can, you know.

FIRST GUARD

Thanks, but we been baptized a'ready.
[*He goes out, Left.*]

SECOND GUARD

The fact is, we're regular disciples, same as you. So next week when you see us apparently on surveillance at Jesus' camp, don't let it fret you none. That's orders.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

We shall understand it. Thanks—

SECOND GUARD

Just don't let John forget us on the Big Day.—Sixth Foot, A Comp'ny—not B. (JOHN *enters from Right, followed by the* FIRST GUARD.) C'mon, Joel. We'll post outside.

[*The GUARDS go out, Back, closing the door after them. JOHN advances into the room, walking as if his feet were still chained. He is white and emaciated, his face covered with the stubble of a beard. SIMON goes to him.*]

SIMON

Ah, Sir—this is more like it!

JOHN

Simon.

SIMON

That's right. It's me, Sir!

JOHN

And— (*He holds up his hand to shield his eyes from the candle-light*)—and you, Zebedee— (*He gropes for his hand.*)—How goes it with you, Son?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Well, Sir, very well.

JOHN

I have been expecting you.

SIMON

He named a dozen of us to go out and preach the towns—and me and Zebedee being as near to Machaerus as we were—well—well, we couldn't but stop by.—How do you like me as a soldier?

JOHN

I think I should have known you, Simon.

SIMON

He was only half my size.

JOHN

What kind of a welcome have they given you in the towns?

SIMON

Immense!—It appears all they have to know is that we come from him.

JOHN

And does that surprise you?

SIMON

Well—

JOHN

It does not surprise me.— Simon, I don't know how much time we have, and I must hear all I can.—His following—is it a large one?

SIMON

Large is not the word, Sir.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

If the present pace keeps up, in another year we'll have recruited half the country.

JOHN

Recruited, did you say?—For what?—Is it an army?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

You might call it that.

JOHN

Might? Speak out! Is it an army?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

No.

[*A pause.*

JOHN

Has there been interference from any quarter?

SIMON

Plenty of it.

JOHN

On what grounds?

SIMON

Some of the Rabbis say he blasphememes. But he don't.

JOHN

What makes them think he does?

[*A pause.*]

JOHN ZEBEDEE

He is the only prophet who—

[*He stops.*]

JOHN

Finish it!

JOHN ZEBEDEE

He is the only prophet we have ever had who speaks his own mind as his own, without forever insisting he is the voice of heaven.

JOHN

He does not need to, maybe.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Whatever the reason, I am glad that—

[*The door at Back is suddenly opened and the SECOND GUARD puts his head in.*]

SECOND GUARD

Look out, there! Someone's coming! Post yourselves beside him—you're guards, see? Quick! (*He closes the door behind him. His voice is heard through it.*) Who goes there?

[*And a mumbled reply. SIMON and JOHN ZEBEDEE take positions at attention, one on either side of JOHN. The door at Back is opened and a MAN-SERVANT enters, with a note.*]

SERVANT

Which way to the Baptist's cell? (*He sees JOHN.*) Are you him?

JOHN

I am.

SERVANT

This came from upstairs.

[*JOHN takes the note, glances at it, crushes it in his hand and return it to the SERVANT.*]

JOHN

Take it back to her.

SERVANT

My orders were to bring you up.

JOHN

I am not going. Take it back.

SERVANT

But the orders were—

JOHN

Get out! Quick! (*The SERVANT goes out. JOHN turns to SIMON.*)—Then he is a true prophet, eh?

SIMON

I'm sure of that, Sir.

JOHN

—And a great one.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Yes.

JOHN (*to SIMON*)

—He is greater than Isaiah, yes?

SIMON

He is like him, but he is greater.

JOHN

—Than all the others—than Elijah, even?

[*A pause. Then:*

SIMON

Yes! Yes, he is!

JOHN (*to JOHN ZEBEDEE*)

He is a greater prophet than John Baptist, eh, Son?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

He is a great prophet, Sir.

JOHN

And has it occurred to none of you that he may be more than that?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

How do you mean?

JOHN

I asked: Has it not occurred to you? Have you had no evidences?—It's likely our time is short and I must know some things, I must know 'em quick. I have been alone in a small room in the dark for many days and nights and I have had intimations which have shook me almost to pieces.—Speak to me all you know of Jesus—I knew him such a short time. Has he changed much?

SIMON

If there's been any changing, it's in us who live with him.

JOHN

But have you never noted that something has come over him in the night? Something curious and strange—like to a possession?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Do you dare to say—!

JOHN

I speak to Simon!—Simon knows me. (*To SIMON.*)
Tell me: who watches over him of nights?

SIMON

Why, we take turns.

JOHN

Watch him well. Watch him.

SIMON

For what?

JOHN

There may come a night when he will stand up from his cot all shining—stand up of a sudden and be changed.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

What are you saying, Sir?

JOHN

His works—has he done anything extraordinary?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Such as what?

JOHN

What has he done?

SIMON

There have been many cured of ailments—but he tells 'em it's their own faith does it.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Their faith in *him*, though!—else how could *we* heal in his name?

JOHN

You are able to do that?

SIMON

We are, Sir.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

What is in your mind about him?

JOHN

It may be he is to be the one we have been waiting for.

SIMON

He? Messiah?

JOHN ZEBEDEE

You believe that?!

JOHN

I have had intimations. I don't know if they be true.

SIMON

He'd be the last to make such a claim, Sir.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

Wait—

JOHN

It may be he does not know it yet. It may be he will not, till it has come about in him.

SIMON

You think the Kingdom is at hand, Sir? That near?

JOHN

There in my cell I have seen the streaming banners, and heard the tread of feet pounding on, north and west. My heart has beat to the neigh of bugles and the shouts of him whose voice is like to *his* voice, but with might in it, whose face is like to *his* face, but with majesty upon it.

SIMON

—Armies.

JOHN

My ears have caught the cries of Roman legions, as they tumbled under, and my nostrils the stink of 'em as they lay and rot there. I have foreseen the day of wrath and him astride the judgment seat, his enemies before him.—“A pair of high-priests, are you?—Well, you shall sit down.—A Roman Governor, name of Pilate? How have you governed?—So will I govern you.—And these two—Tetrarch and his lady, eh? You, Tetrarch, shall hang high as Haman—you, Madam, shall be stoned for an adulteress: it is the Law.

SIMON (*in pain*)

Listen, Zebedee, listen—

JOHN ZEBEDEE

We have changed—*he* can.

JOHN

—Then I have seen the Kingdom, with the King in splendor, ruling his enemies with a rod of iron, breaking them in pieces like a potter's bowl.

SIMON

—Must it be that way?

JOHN

How otherwise? It is written so: in the Kingdom, peace under the King's uplifted sword and thought the world, fear of the Lord of Israel—(*He rises.*) If I could go to him—! Ah, I must go soon. Tell me, what good are you fellows?—Can't you get me out of here within the month, say?

[*There is a silence. Then:*

JOHN ZEBEDEE

A month is a short time, Sir.

JOHN

Is it, Son?

SIMON

We'll do what we can—

JOHN

Do, Simon.—You see, for an active man like me, it is a poor life, here.

[*The FIRST and SECOND GUARDS enter hastily.*]

SECOND GUARD (*to SIMON*)

You got to get out, now—Quick!

JOHN ZEBEDEE

But we—

SECOND GUARD

Not a minute! Go on!

[*The FIRST GUARD kneels and fastens the chains again about JOHN'S ankles.*]

SIMON

Good-bye—good-bye, Sir.

[*He goes to him, and embraces him.*]

JOHN

Good-bye, Simon. (*To JOHN ZEBEDEE.*) Good-bye, Son.

JOHN ZEBEDEE

You are a great prophet, Sir.

JOHN

Maybe I am, Son.

SIMON

—The Messiah—Jesus?—I doubt it's ever been in his mind—

JOHN

Then put it there!—Go to him straightway, you two, and say I want to know is he the one who is to come, or must I look for another.

SIMON

Right, Sir.

JOHN

—And bring me back word.

SIMON

Right, Sir. Come, Zebedee—

[*The two GUARDS take positions beside JOHN. SIMON and JOHN ZEBEDEE go out. After a moment the door is opened again by the MAN-SERVANT to admit HERODIAS and HANAN. The dance-tune of Act IV begins to be heard from the dining-hall above.*]

HERODIAS (*to the GUARDS*)

Leave us.

SECOND GUARD

Yes, Excellency.

[*They go out, Back. HERODIAS regards JOHN silently for a moment, and then speaks.*]

HERODIAS

I am not come to argue, Baptist. Have you found him you sought or have you not?

JOHN

I think I have.

HANAN

Ah!

HERODIAS

I am glad!

JOHN

—But I am not yet sure.

HERODIAS

That will come. I think we may anticipate it.

JOHN

Happen we may.

HERODIAS

Why did you send back my message?

JOHN

It was an order, and I don't take 'em.

HERODIAS

I see.—Perhaps you will permit me to couch it as a suggestion, then.

JOHN

Well?

HERODIAS

In the room above us eight men are waiting. They are the land- and sea-forces, the government and the purse. They are Israel, these eight. It is you they are waiting for.

JOHN

I shan't go up to 'em.

HERODIAS

I told you I should not argue.

JOHN

That consoles me.

HANAN

May I speak, Excellency? (*She nods. He turns to JOHN.*)—You would prefer it if they came down?

HERODIAS

Is that it?

JOHN

They may stay where they are.

HERODIAS

Perhaps you have a plan of action other than mine. What is it?

JOHN

I would recommend that you set me free, Madam, and instantly.

HERODIAS

If there is no fault in to-night's proceedings, you will go forth in the morning, with your adjutants.

JOHN

To-night's proceedings—?

HANAN

It may seem rather an empty form, but I assure you it is most important.

JOHN

For what?

HANAN

Well, as a matter of record—

HERODIAS

—A clear statement of your aims.

HANAN (*to* HERODIAS)

—And for exchange of assurances?

HERODIAS

Precisely.

HANAN (*to* JOHN)

There you are.

JOHN

I am to proclaim you and Antipas?

HERODIAS

You are to proclaim yourself. We shall defer to you.

JOHN

You—?!

HERODIAS

Yes. I have come to that in this past month. Is it enough?

JOHN

I am astonished.

HANAN

Her Excellency is a patriot of the first water, Sir. Her only thought is for her country's welfare.

HERODIAS

Afterwards you may do for us what you will. I shall be content with that.

JOHN

Oh shrewd—shrewd—

HERODIAS

What do you mean!

JOHN

Your fine renunciation would be most affecting to the eight upstairs, and most persuasive of a pure purpose, eh?

HERODIAS

Baptist, we have no time for this sort of talk.

[JOHN *rises*.

JOHN

You're right. We've not. If your concern for Israel is what you say it is, you will give the order for my release at once, and I shall go north straightway.

HERODIAS

—To do what?

JOHN

I think there is a man there with a secret. I will share in it.

HERODIAS

Speak plainly! Are you Messiah, or are you not?

JOHN

I am John Baptist.

HERODIAS

That is all?

JOHN

That is plenty.

HERODIAS

Then Messiah is not yet, eh?

JOHN

I shall find that out.

HERODIAS

From whom?

JOHN

From Jesus.

HERODIAS

Jesus!? What has he to do with it?

JOHN

Happen he is the one.

HERODIAS

Oh fool—fool!

JOHN

Happen so, Madam. Happen not.

HERODIAS

It is impossible that such a man should lead an army!

JOHN

We shall see if it is.

HERODIAS

He is a pious schoolmaster. He is without one spark of national feeling. To-morrow we shall send you to his camp to hear him. When you have proved us right—

JOHN

I will not make any bargain with you.

HERODIAS

I ask none.—Nor in your coming glory do I ask any promise of reward. It will be enough to know that I have shared in bringing it about.—Ah, let me share in that!

JOHN

No.

HERODIAS

There is no Kingdom at all without me, Baptist.

JOHN

I doubt that, Madam.

HERODIAS

Are you not great enough to turn what is evil to a good end?

JOHN

No. Nor is anyone.

HERODIAS

You must! You cannot do otherwise!

JOHN

Watch me.

HERODIAS

—And shall you have no captains in your army who command for gain? Will every soldier's heart beneath your banner be pigeon-pure? Will loving-kindness run along their swords, or will hate tip them? Which kills best, eh? (*A brief pause. Then:*) Ah, Baptist—make use of me! I am a sinful woman, yes—but what is that to you? Make use of me! I hold that which you need, that which you cannot come into your own for lack of.—Despise me, but make use of it! It is the same thing we reach for, is it not?—Then use me.

JOHN

I cannot use you, Madam.

[*A pause.*]

HERODIAS

—And if you should end your life here—now, to-night, how will it come about, then?

HANAN

Excellency—

[*She gestures him to silence.*]

JOHN

That is easy: I shall not end it here.

HERODIAS

—Your whole life has been fashioned to one end—and you will let a woman cut it short this side of destiny.

JOHN

When I am dead, my destiny shall have been filled. It is not yet—so I cannot die, you see.

HERODIAS

I tell you that if you—! (*Then, as a last appeal:*) Ah Baptist—outwit me—trick me. Go forth to-night on my arrangements. Come into your Messiahship—then turn about and crush us. But let me feel, somehow, that I have shared.—Remember, it is the same thing we two want, the self-same thing!

JOHN

Madam, if what I want should come about through you, it would no longer be what I want.

[*For a long moment HERODIAS gazes at him. Then she turns abruptly to HANAN.*

HERODIAS

It is enough. Come—

[*She goes swiftly to the door, and out. The dance-tune is heard to stop. There is a clapping of hands.*

HANAN advances to JOHN.

HANAN

Have you left your senses entirely? With whom have

you been dealing, do you think? Do you imagine for one minute, knowing all you know about her now, you'll be let live? Do you?

JOHN

Let me tell you what I imagine, Hanan: I imagine I am put in this world for one purpose, and shall not quit this world until it is accomplished.

HANAN

We told you the truth of Jesus, do you understand? The truth!

JOHN

Maybe I mis-heard you, eh?

HANAN

Come up with me—do as she asks—go through the form, anyway—then you'll have time for him afterwards.

JOHN

No.

HANAN

You'll die for a misconception, will you?

JOHN

It is not that—and I shan't die yet, little man. Not me.

HANAN

I saw what was in her face, I tell you!—Listen!
[From far off, Back Right, a voice is heard shouting:]

THE VOICE

Clear the halls! Clear the halls!

HANAN

Do you know what that means?

JOHN

I have told you it is not possible that I should die with my work unfinished. So you may go in peace.

HANAN

But you're not sure he is the one—you've said you're not.

JOHN

I am not sure, no. But I shall be!

THE VOICE (*nearer*)

Clear the halls! Clear the halls!

HANAN (*in desperation*)

Oh this must not be! It must not!

THE VOICE (*nearer*)

Clear the halls!

[HANAN *flings open the door, Back, and shouts:*

HANAN

Wait! Wait! (*He turns to JOHN with an imploring gesture.*) Baptist—

JOHN

Don't fret, little man.

THE VOICE

Clear the halls—! (*The SERVANT puts his head in the*

door.) Clear the—! (*He sees JOHN.*) Oh. (*He opens the door wide and calls through it:*) Clear the halls! [*SALOME enters down the stairway, followed by two SERVANTS bearing a silver platter, silver basins and white towels. After them comes the PRISON OFFICIAL, carrying his sword. SALOME is in a white-and-silver dress. She is breathless with excitement. She stands against the wall, Right, one foot braced against it, staring fascinatedly at JOHN. The SERVANTS put down their bowls and towels, go silently to JOHN, and raise him from the bench. HANAN screams at him:*

HANAN

Now do you believe me? Now do you?

PRISON OFFICIAL

—Down on your knees—head straight—arms at the side.— Here.

JOHN

I am to be put to death?

PRISON OFFICIAL

Those are my orders.

[*A moment.*

JOHN

And now?

PRISON OFFICIAL

At once.

[*JOHN looks to HANAN, who cannot meet his eyes. JOHN'S head drops for a moment upon his breast. Then he raises it, a firm, great certainty upon his face.*

JOHN

Then I *am* sure! (*He kneels, facing front, arms straight at his side. HANAN turns away, sobbing bitterly. One of the SERVANTS advances with a bandage for JOHN's eyes. He pushes it aside. The other unfolds a towel and pours water from one basin into another. JOHN closes his eyes for a moment, then opens them.*) Very well. Let me have it.

SALOME (*in a breath*)

Hurry, you! Why don't you *hurry*!?

[THE OFFICIAL *advances*.

Curtain.



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